A FUSIONRETROBOOKS PUBLICATION

ZZAP! 64

ANNUAL 2019

THE COMMODORE

ZZAP! COVER GIRL!

SAM'S JOURNEY

JAZ RIGNALL'S GOLD MEDAL ZZAPIBACK

HOW TO MAKE A GAME A SIZZLER

35 REVIEWS PLUS PREVIEWS

AND ME!!

OLIVER FREY

Annual 2019

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The opinions and views of correspondents are their own and are not necessarily in accordance with those of the publisher.

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FUSION RETRO BOOKS

† Google says this is the collective noun for a bunch of nerdy game coders.

The Commodore Story

Changing the world 8-bits at a time

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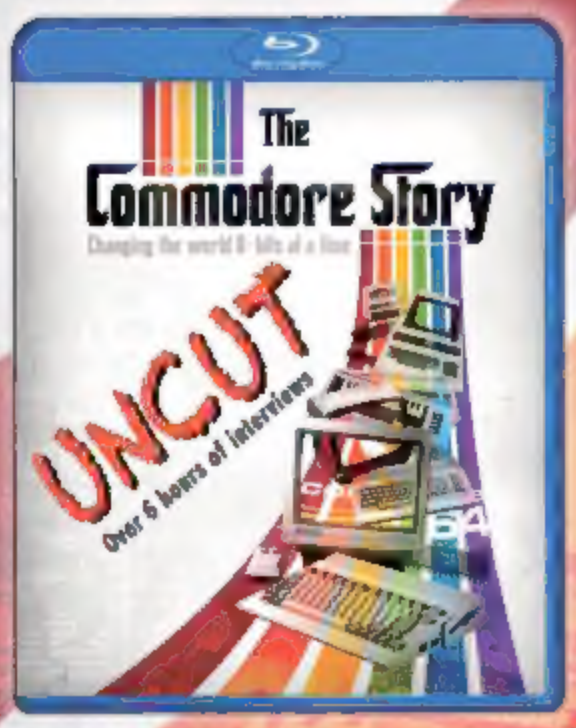

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NEW for 2019...

The Vinyl Story
Keeping in the groove

ZZAP! ED

GETTING GOING

In the editorial of issue 4 of ZZAP!64 I announced that I had become editor and Chris Anderson, who so successfully launched the magazine for Newsfield, had felt unable for personal reasons to accompany the editorial offices from Yeovil where he lived to Ludlow. Only weeks before, I had expected to continue as editor of Crash, but events overtook me and I not only had to get to grips with the C64 and its games but also with the feisty lads who turned the formerly peaceful Crash offices into their own den of iniquity!

Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and – shortly after – Gary Liddon turned Newsfield inside out, like a whirlwind. If any readers at the time thought there was uniformity of opinion over the merit of the games in for review, they would have been surprised at the fury and the depth of argument. As editor, my function was less to guide than to act as referee at times . . . but I wouldn't have had it any other way. In a few weeks, it jelled and we all worked to make ZZAP! the massive Commodore games mag it soon became.

Mind you, it wouldn't have been as big a success without you – the loyal readership, always willing to participate in Scorelord Challenges, rag the team at the various computer shows and buy ZZAP! every month. Over the years the editorial team changed and I pay tribute on page 128 to those who continued to keep ZZAP! at the top of its game until the 8-bit market finally faded away into 16-bit, 32-bit and cartridge-based consoles.

Whoever thought it would survive and once again flourish? But here we are, and I hope this ZZAP!64 Annual will bring joy to all those who have never let the C64 out of their hearts.

Roger Kean

Photo: Cameron Pound

JUST WHO IS THIS LLOYD MANGRAM?

Jazza Rignall, Gazzas Liddon and Penn, Lloyd Mangram, Roger Kean and . . . er, a *Sinclair User* logo on the mantelpiece. Baiting rivals by stealing their PCW Show signage was all part of editorial bonding for the new ZZAP! team.

Photo: Roger Kean

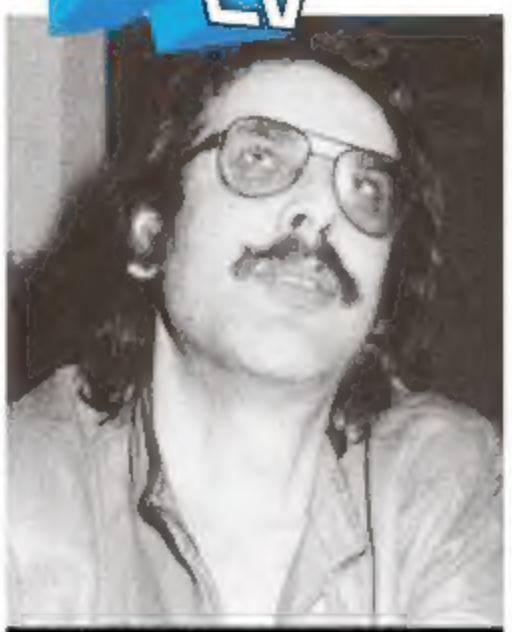
Chris Anderson, left, at the ZZAP!64 launch party in Ludlow; with subs supremo Denise Roberts, Bob Wade, CRASH reviewer Matthew Uffindell and leaning in for a look at what's amusing Chris so much – Oliver Frey.

OCEAN'S BIGGEST EVER BOOB

Talking of Oli Frey, who remembers how our art editor came to the rescue of Ocean-Imagine? The artwork for *Game Over* (1987) caused an upset when first revealed to distributors and retail buyers. Painted by Luis Royo, it depicted Queen Gremia's outthrust nipples. Recalling how Oli modified his *Beach Head II* cover to remove the blood so US Gold could use it for the game's inlay, a panicked Ocean marketing department asked us to do something to make the image less shocking to a 1980s audience. Oli duly obliged by painting an in-keeping metallic bra to hide Gremia's bits . . . . . well, just.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

AUGUST 1985: The ZZAP! Mail Order department asks that we print a short message regarding subscribers who are still awaiting their free games. Normally the girls cope very well, but with some 4,000 plus subscribers in a very short space of time there have been approximately 12,500 cassettes to despatch over the past four weeks, which has meant some of you have had to wait rather a long time. On top of that, one or two titles were out of stock which made the delay a little worse. The ZZAP! Mail Order department apologises. The backlog is being cleared as fast as possible!


Rob Hubbard (see also page 66)

Ben Daglish

David Whittaker

Tony Crowther (with Dim Dim)

Photos: Cameron Pound

STRETCHING SID

'Has the quality of music on 64 games improved recently? Is there more of it? Can there be more? Can it get any better? Has the limit of the SID chip been reached?' we asked in issue 15's editorial (August 1986). The answers (page 40) were presented under the heading The Musicians Ball, featuring those luminaries of symphonic splendour

Rob Hubbard (30), Ben Daglish (19), David Whittaker (29) and Tony Crowther (*must've been about 11 then —Ed*) in conversation with the Garys Penn and Liddon at ZZAP! Towers. Well we all know what they did with SID (the musicians that is, not Penn or Liddon), and on page 67 of the Annual **Max Hall** has found some hardware to enlarge SID's expansive waistline ever more . . . oh, and on the page before it check out why Rob Hubbard has returned to SIDdism.

You really need to know who to blame! Here is our panel of games reviewers – kids (at heart) every one!

JULIAN 'JAZ' RIGNALL is a veteran video games journalist who's been writing about gaming ever since he won *Computer and Video Games*'s National Arcade Championships back in 1983. He joined ZZAP!64 as a teenager in early 1985 and spent three and a half years working at the magazine, initially as staff writer, and eventually becoming editor-in-chief in 1986. Since then he has run a wide variety of gaming publications, including

Computer and Video Games, *Mean Machines*, *Nintendo Magazine System*, the *Official Sega Magazine*, IGN.com, and *GamePro*. He currently lives in California, where he works as a qualitative video game research analyst.

(Jaz is so modest that he left out the bit about becoming a telly star alongside Patrick 'Stargazer' Moore back in them olden cathode-ray tube days —*Ed.)*

Still gaming in his (very late) 40s and hubby to equally mad gamer Shelly and their massive consoles collection, former staff writer **ROBIN HOGG** flew the Newsfield nest for rather different climates and is now breaking bits of planes for a living, which is ironic as he did much the same flying his beloved flight simulators at ZZAP! Towers. Halcyon days, he says with no hint of rose tint on his glasses (just don't mention Operation Thunderbolt).

Favourite games? *Armalyte* as he is a massive *Gradius* fan, and *Project: Stealth Fighter* which happens to be his all time favourite C64 game. On a final note (guilty conscience?), Robin would like to refer readers to the title of his tips section of old if they found any tips and pokes didn't quite work as planned. Excuses, excuses.

A ZZAP!64 reader since Issue 4, **PAUL MORRISON** unsuccessfully applied for a reviewer's job at the mag when just 17. Proving that dreams can come true, Paul is finally an official ZZAP! staffer, but can be found writing about 8-bit games in various other places, too. A gamer since the 1970s, and briefly the MAME World Record holder on *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, when he's not welded to his keyboard for writing purposes, Paul enjoys nothing more

than chatting with like-minded folks and assuring them that *Paradroid* is, indeed, the best game ever. Outside gaming, when he isn't dealing with a moody teenager or helping his youngest son with yet another maths problem, he can often be found sobbing into his Newcastle United scarf or insisting that 1980s rock music is still miles better than all that modern rubbish.

It was a warm weekend morning sometime in March 1984 when two parents gave their son a Commodore 64 and had no idea what they would unleash. More than thirty years later, **MAT ALLEN** is a notable member of the Commodore community and scene under the handle 'Mayhem', part of the GameBase64 preservation project, with arguably the most complete Commodore cartridge collection known. He has contributed to ZZAP!64 during

both its original era and the two fan-made magazines, together with several other Commodore related publications, and once again brings his own brand of insight, wit, experience and judgement to the table in assessing some of today's popular releases.

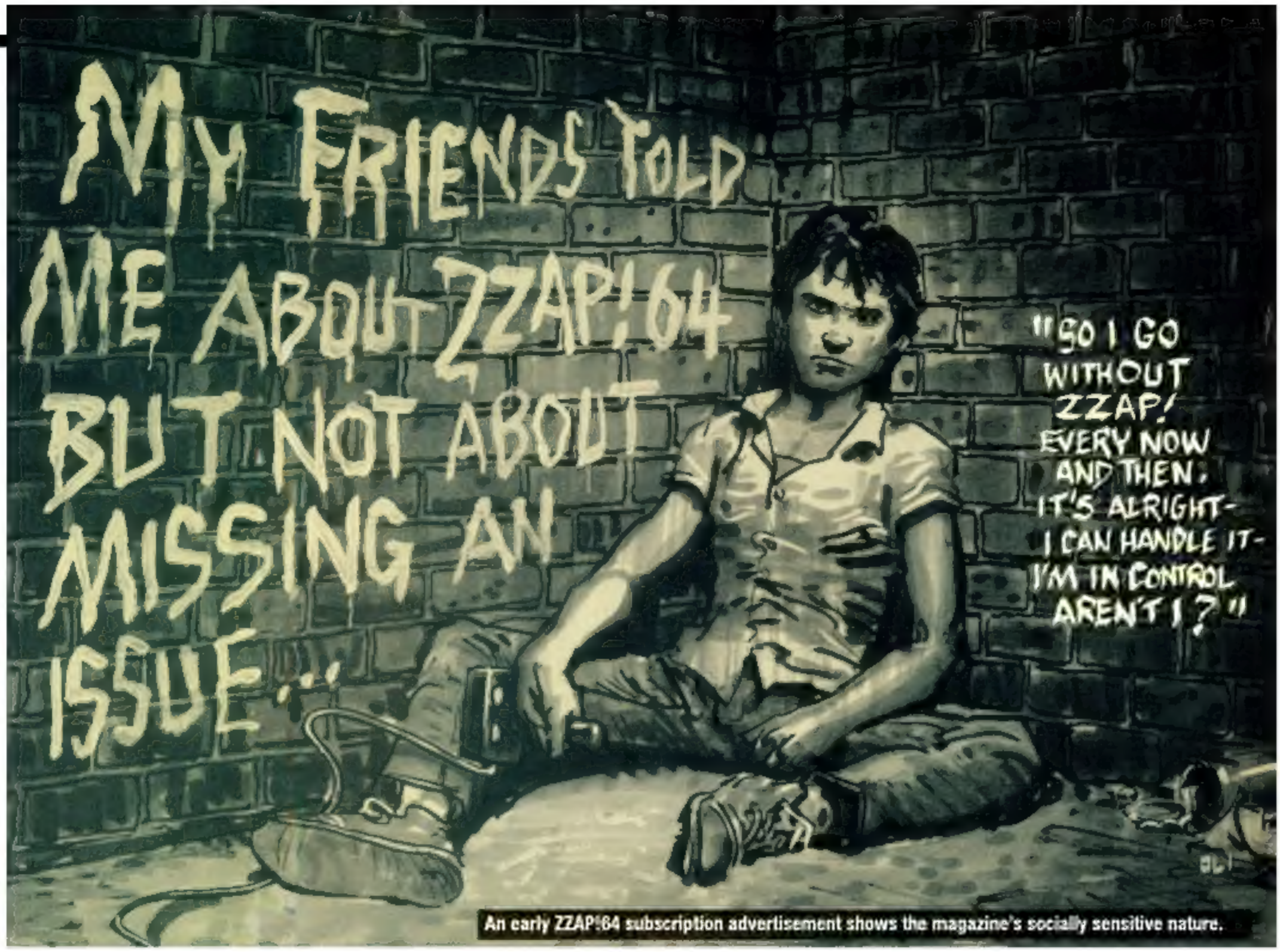
Be afraid, be very afraid...

CHRIS WILKINS has been around in retro circles for some time – first dabbling in retro events, then retro magazines, and then retro books with none other than the editor of this very 'issue' of ZZAP!64. He has now settled into producing yearly publications of yesteryear Newsfield magazines that are aptly called Annuals. He got his first 8-bit computer back in 1982 after nagging his parents for an arcade experience in the bedroom

– he had to wait a good few years before that actually happened. These days Chris plays on the current gen systems but finds himself collecting all the systems he wished he'd had as a kid. There is always the next purchase – there is still so much to collect. (He has a very understanding wife —*Ed!*)

Judge Drokk – aka **MARK HELLEWELL** – will be well known to afficionados of the Amiga demoscene, but before that he was an ardent fan of the Amiga's older sibling, as he so eloquently puts it. 'I was quoted in the recent past as having said something akin to "the Commodore 64 wasn't just a computer but a friend". In fact I'd go as far as to say it's a comfort blanket. I've enjoyed technology and gaming since the days of

clockwork handhelds and monochrome pixels but the C64 came at a pivotal time and the impact it made set a path for everything that followed from the underground Amiga demoscene and even the genres of gaming I find most enjoyable today. No matter how far technology has moved on and new gaming opportunities present themselves I always feel truly at home when returning to the Commodore 64. A friend for life.'



An early ZZAP!64 subscription advertisement shows the magazine's socially sensitive nature.

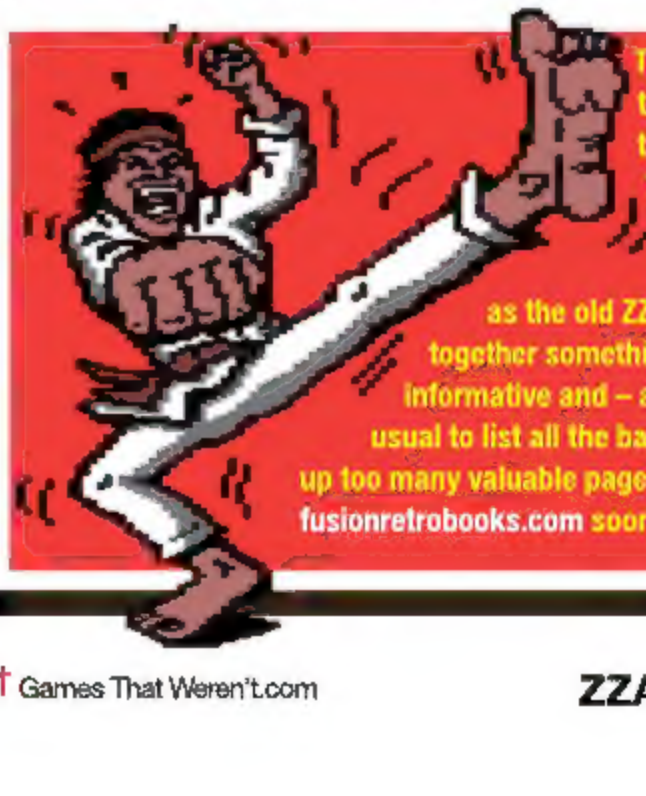
PLEASE SIR, CAN I WORK ON ZZAP!64...

Photo: Cameron Pound

Paul Morrison (left in the blue panel) says he was unsuccessful in getting a job on ZZAP! when he was 17, but in 1989 Geordie **Paul Rand** (doing his signature Wallace) was selected at the same age. But as Randy discovered, the ZZAP! interview process could be painful, fraught and alienating – a process brilliantly depicted here in a cruelly accurate cartoon by Newsfield's very own Mark 'Markie' Kendrick. Read about other ZZAP! staffers in their own words, starting on page 112.

AND THE 1980s (WELL BASTED) GOLDEN TURKEY AD AWARD GOES TO...

... for being a stunning example of classy drawing and subtle colour rendition in the face of overwhelming odds ... not to mention that the C64 version never appeared! The Spectrum and Amstrad versions are described on the GTW64† as 'a rather shite game', so perhaps it's best that the C64 version didn't see the light of day ... the advertisement was bad enough! And speaking of which, on page 76 Martyn Carroll reveals more games that were promised but then simply vanished.



Time to say a BIG Thank You to all those who supported the Kickstarter campaign. Your generosity made all that follows possible. I just hope we – the new as well as the old ZZAP!64 staffers – have put together something you will find amusing, informative and – above all – entertaining. It's usual to list all the backers, but that would eat up too many valuable pages, so instead find the list at fusionretrobooks.com soon after the Annual comes out.

† Games That Weren't.com

COMMANDO ARCADE SE

Nostalgia — 2015

The 1980s were a battlefield for 8-bit owners. With the format wars being fiercely fought in playgrounds across the land, Spectrum and C64 fans claimed that games released for their system were better than those for others . . . while Amstrad owners just looked on, wiping bitter tears of defeat from their war-torn faces.

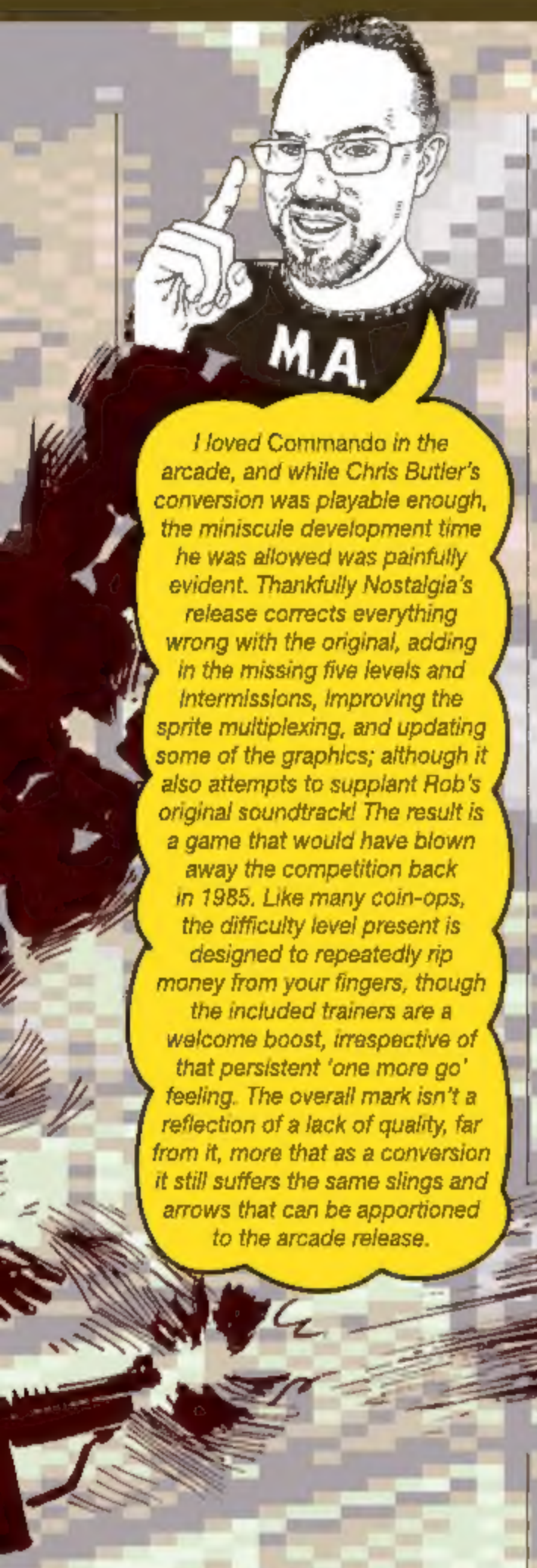
Commando was a game that 8-bit owners fought over tooth and nail. C64 owners, while having a decent arcade conversion on their hands, were acutely aware that ultimately *Commando* for the C64 was broken. With only three levels of the arcade game's original eight, flickering graphics, slowdown and a tendency to crash, in this instance it seemed that Spectrum owners had won the battle with a fast-paced fully intact adaptation of the game to use as ammo to hurl at C64 owners. Even the loading screen was better on the Spectrum.

Thankfully Rob Hubbard's incredible C64 music meant total defeat was never an option.

Few back then would have thought that the 8-bit gaming scene would be still be alive, let alone quite as active as it is nowadays. Even fewer would have expected that a cracking team like Nostalgia would take it upon themselves to take the old wounded war dog that is *Commando* 64 into their care with a view to heal his wounds and help him recover from the atrocities of the fierce conflicts that had gone before. But . . . care for him they did and, blinking in the harsh sunlight of March 2015, he strode back into the scene, fully revitalised, armed to the teeth and ready to fight the good fight once more.

I remember reviewing Elite's Commodore 64 conversion of Commando *back in issue 10 and bemoaning its lack of levels. It featured a piffling three of the original arcade machine's eight, and felt woefully incomplete as a consequence. Well stap me vitals if three decades later there isn't an updated version that adds the missing levels, introduces the coin-op's iconic transition screens, and incorporates new graphics routines that deliver flicker-free action. It also features new music that's nowhere near as good as Rob Hubbard's original soundtrack – but fortunately you can toggle between the old and the new. If it ain't broke, don't fix it! Gameplay-wise,* Commando Arcade *is as faithful a reproduction of the 1985 run-and-gun shooter as you could wish for on the trusty old Commodore 64, and it packs a considerable challenge as you forge into battle amid a hail of incoming ordnance. The collision detection is occasionally a little suspect, but fortunately it works both ways: sometimes enemies don't die despite a hand grenade landing right on top of them, but then an enemy bullet might occasionally clip through you without harm. It's nothing too heinous, however, and fortunately doesn't take the shine off what is otherwise a cracking contemporary conversion of Capcom's coin-op classic.*

"I'M THE STRONGEST!"



I loved Commando *in the arcade, and while Chris Butler's conversion was playable enough, the miniscule development time he was allowed was painfully evident. Thankfully Nostalgia's release corrects everything wrong with the original, adding in the missing five levels and Intermissions, Improving the sprite multiplexing, and updating some of the graphics; although it also attempts to supplant Rob's original soundtrack! The result is a game that would have blown away the competition back in 1985. Like many coin-ops, the difficulty level present is designed to repeatedly rip money from your fingers, though the included trainers are a welcome boost, irrespective of that persistent 'one more go' feeling. The overall mark isn't a reflection of a lack of quality, far from it, more that as a conversion it still suffers the same slings and arrows that can be apportioned to the arcade release.*

Did you ever play Chris Butler's Commando *conversion and think 'this is great . . . if only there were more levels'? Well you're in luck, because now there are: five more, to be precise, courtesy of the Nostalgia team. They've taken the fun-but-flawed original and added the levels missing from the original conversion. The result of this is a truly challenging, satisfying shoot 'em up which more than does justice to its arcade parent. There are cosmetic enhancements too: a superb loading screen, improved graphics, the arcade game's intermission screens and a new soundtrack, should you wish to replace Rob Hubbard's sublime original (you won't). The whole thing feels so much more like the arcade game, and to top it off there's a trainer included to help you see those new features and levels. It's taken 30 years, but finally C64 owners have the definitive 8-bit* Commando.

Keep an eye out for the guys hiding behind the pillboxes.

With a list of fixes and improvements as long as one's arm – new sprite multiplexer, new graphics, all eight original arcade levels, helicopter dropships, level transition screens, bug and glitch fixes galore, new sound modes, a pause option, one of the greatest loading screens around and more.

With *Commando*, we ZZAP! readers and Commodore 64 owners might have lost the battle, but with *Commando Arcade SE* we definitely won the war.

PRESENTATION 92%
A wealth of options to help you get the most out of the game.

GRAPHICS 86%
Enhanced versions of the original's graphics look great, and the glitches have been removed.

SOUND 94%
Rob Hubbard's incredible original soundtrack remains, and there's also a new, but inferior alternative.

HOOKABILITY 93%
That run-and-gun gameplay is just as addictive as it ever was.

LASTABILITY 88%
Eight tough levels to conquer make this a challenge you'll keep coming back to.

OVERALL 90%

Finally, a Commando conversion C64 owners can be truly proud of.

PLANET GOLF

RGCD & Psytronik – released 2017

Remember ZZAP!64 issue 15 with *Leader Board* on the cover? Finding it a challenge to depict golf in an exciting way, Mr Frey's solution was the lolly licking blonde, with the golfer reflected in her shades. Oli revisited the sport once again with *Planet Golf*, supplying the out-of-this-world artwork for the title.

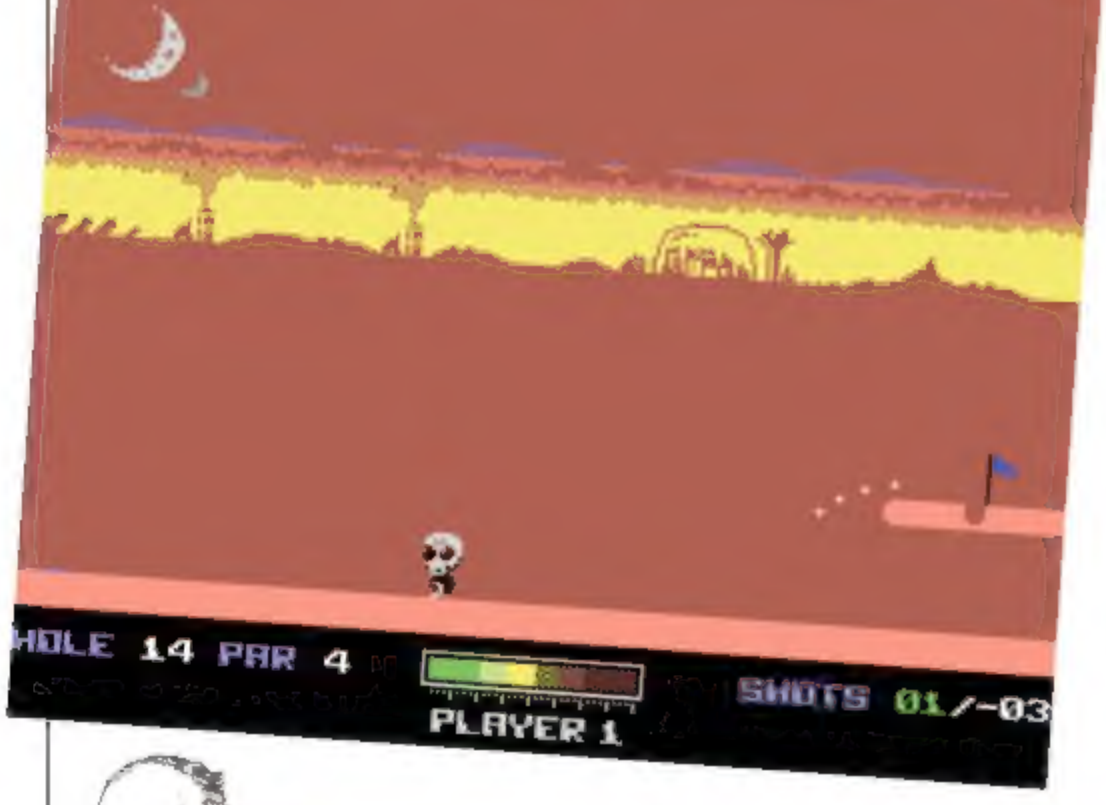
The game pays tribute to Alan Shepard, who played golf on the moon during the Apollo 14 expedition in 1971, only now you can play a round on five different courses in the solar system. Earth, Mars and Jupiter each has a 21-hole course, while two further courses of the traditional 18 holes can be unlocked as you progress through the game.

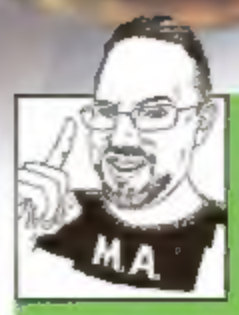
The mechanism for hitting the ball is very *Angry Birds*. A single pixel represents the ball and a trajectory animation shows where the ball will fly when struck. Holding down the fire button determines how hard the ball is hit, shown by a power bar – once the fire button is let go, the ball is set on its travels.

Each planet features individual hazards, including harsh terrain: on Earth birds fly across the screen and squawk when struck by a ball, miss-hit balls are swallowed with a plop by deep lakes; on Mars aliens love to kick a ball off the fairway; Pluto has lasers, boulders, anti-gravity fields and even black holes.

Gravity plays a big part across the planets – the lesser gravity of Pluto and Mars means the ball has to be hit less hard to get where you want it to go and the inertia of the ball behaves accordingly.

Planet Golf has one and two-player modes, and mention must be made of the voice effects in the game calling out 'Let's Play' and 'Oops' and all manner of other expressions at appropriate moments.





To paraphrase the words of a well-known Frank Sinatra song, 'Oops, there goes another broken joystick!' Which is a shame, because there is a damn fine golf game present, one that's easy to pick up and play, relatively straightforward and with each nuance introduced and waiting to be explored per planet. Did I say nuance? About as subtle as a brick to the face as you land in the water for the umpteenth time. What would help is having the previous aim direction retained between unsuccessful shots so you could tweak it slightly. Now excuse me as the air is still blue...

A lot of work has gone into the professionally presented front end: good looking selection screens; top notch music; and the story footage is a lovely bonus. But the game itself, with its pretty basic 2D course views, looks a bit disappointing. The gameplay uses the ballistic physics element normally seen in a Tanks-style *game, only with golf balls instead of shells.* Planet Golf *is a substantial challenge, however, as you try to get the balance right between avoiding course hazards and overcooking (in my case too many) shots on multiple planets with varying gravity. There is longer-term appeal, but it can be frustrating to not feel fully in control of each shot. Two-player mode would be more fun, but for me* Planet Golf *was a little too basic looking at its heart. Got the bird a few times though.*

I have spent far too long on my phone playing games like Desert Golfing *and* Super Stickman Golf, *so the prospect of something similar on a 64 filled me with a mixture of joy and dread. Unfortunately, dread won out as* Planet Golf *tested my skills to the limits. It's one of the most infuriating games I've ever played – I've never smashed a joystick in anger, but this pushed me closer than any game before. It's a tough one to rate, in all honesty. I appreciate what's been done, and if you get into it there are plenty of courses to learn and improve your score on. For those with less patience, though,* Planet Golf *may quickly become far too frustrating to persevere with.*

PRESENTATION 92%
The game oozes professionalism, with good options and some wonderful extras.

GRAPHICS 64%
Mostly very basic through necessity, but effective, with the occasional nice sprite thrown in.

SOUND 85%
Some pleasant music and good speech and applause, but minimal spot FX.

HOOKABILITY 76%
Initially very addictive, with different obstacles and atmospheres providing a real challenge.

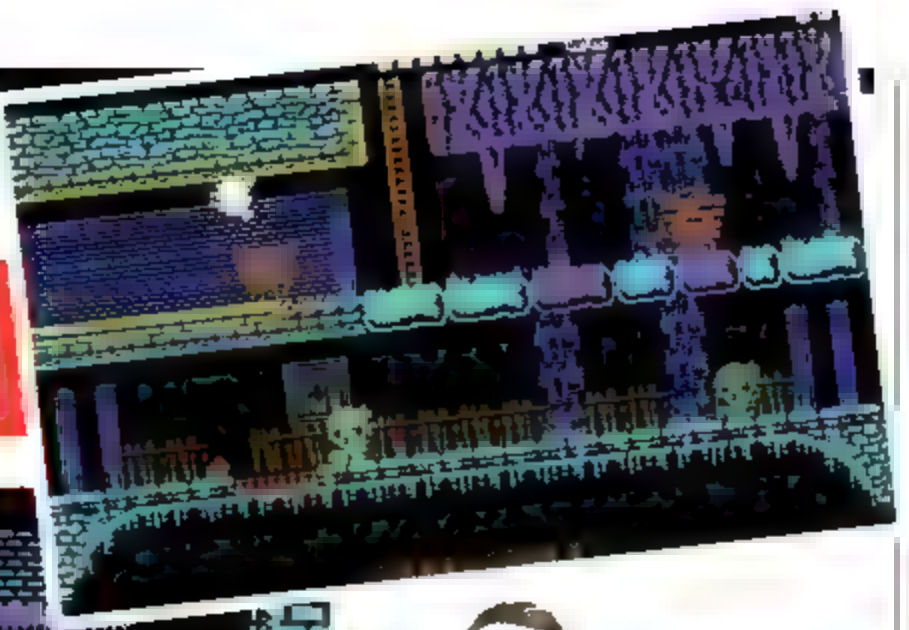
LASTABILITY 74%
It's very Marmite: either wonderfully addictive or off-puttingly infuriating, depending on your view.

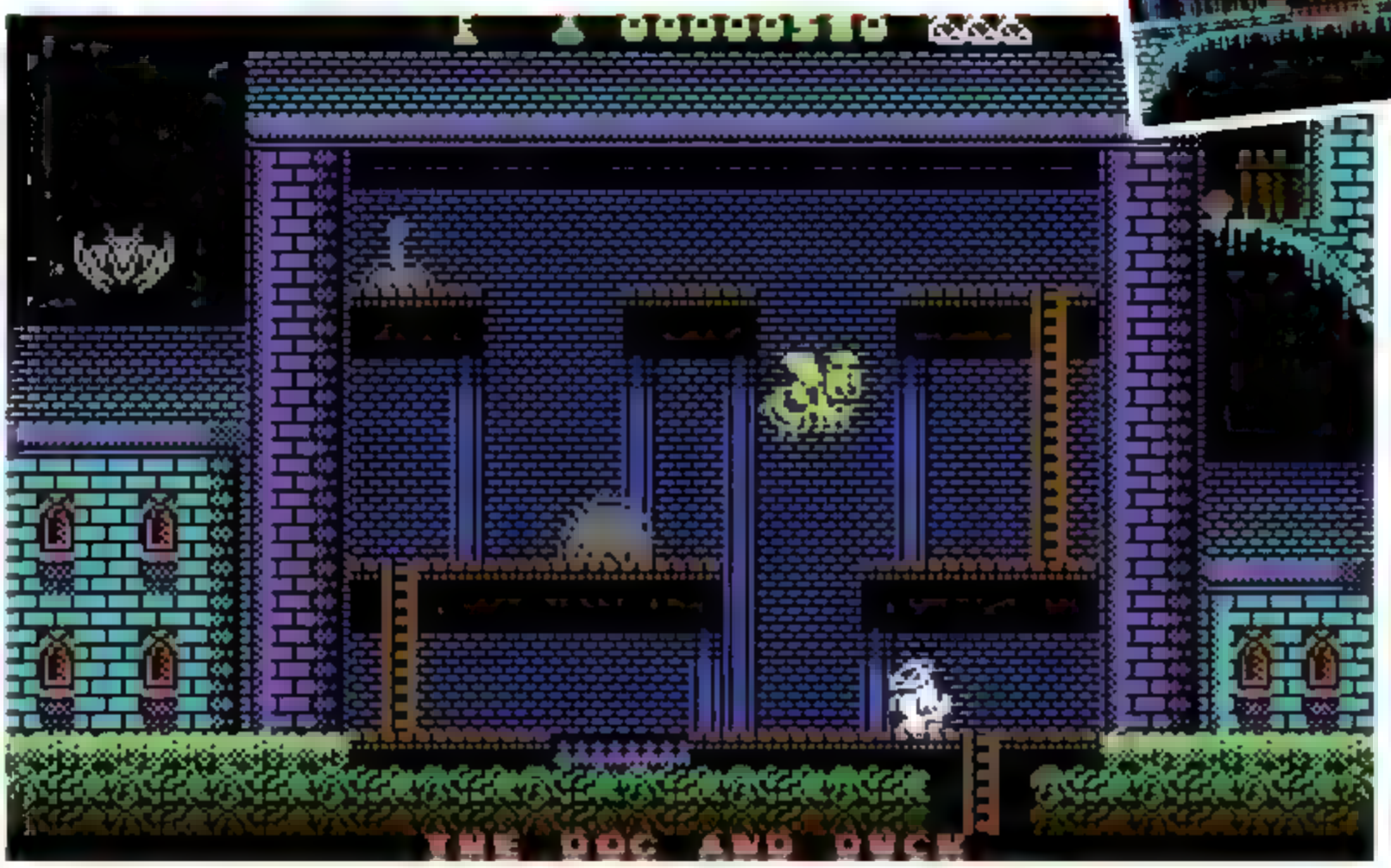
OVERALL 74%

A very well-done version of an old staple, but the difficulty level may prove frustrating for many.

BARNSLEY BADGER

Psytronik — 2018





What is it with anthropomorphic animals . . . at the slightest drop of a mad badger's hat they take off at a breakneck speed for the nearest hole. Examine the evidence: Monty went looking for coal, Rockford went to dig up diamonds and now Barnsley Badger is on the hunt for the lost treasure of Tutanbodger.

This, he has heard, is secreted in a graveyard. To be fair to Mr Barnsley, he has a gambling problem and reckons the lost treasure will be the answer to all his money problems. But is the graveyard a gamble too far?

Barnsley Badger is a throw back to the platforming games of our youth. The main character sprites and the many enemies could have been pulled right out of the mid-1980s. Even a few minutes' play reveals the love and attention the developers have put into the game's details. These include loads of screens of inventive locations to explore while your ears receive a good workout with lively SID music to accompany the visuals.

With 120 screens to master, you are not going to unearth *(snigger)* the graveyard's secrets in one sitting. Be prepared to invest a lot of hours before Barnsley emerges blinking into the sunlight once again

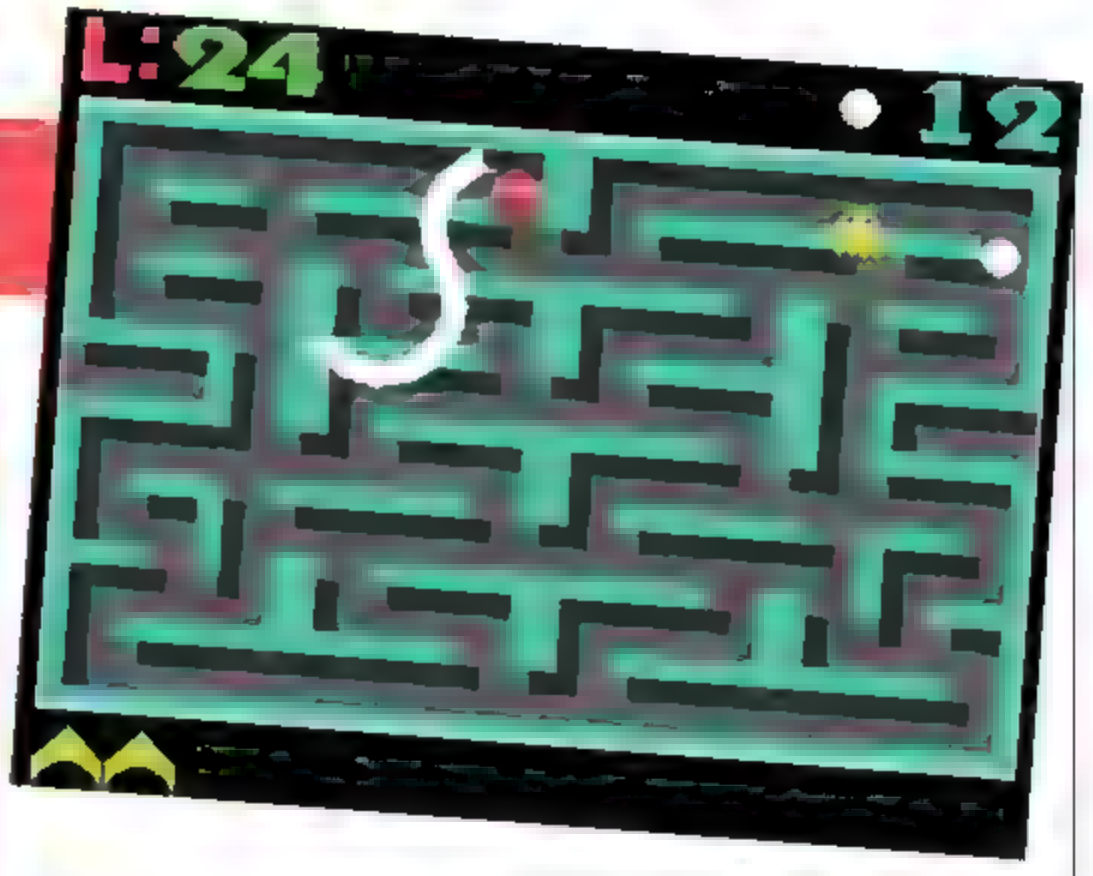
A fan of platform games since Miner 2049'er *on the old Atari, one of my very favourites is* Monty on the Run. Barnsley Badger *clearly tips his hat in the direction of the later* Monty *games, and that instant familiarity makes for an easy in. There's something comforting in leaping around individually named and bizarrely laid-out screens, avoiding weird-looking enemies, collecting coins and other items. In this respect,* Barnsley Badger *succeeds, looking and sounding fine (if unspectacular). The control method is improved over those old classics, giving a welcome extra leeway when jumping. It's a nice game.* Really, *it is. It does everything well, but I just didn't find it all that exciting. Maybe I'm spoiled.*

I love the Monty Mole *vibe of* Barnsley Badger *with its same sense of humour, variety of screens and general fun nature. The map is large, nicely thought out and I enjoyed the challenge of working towards each save point. The game is addictive, with a nicely paced rhythm as Barnsely scampers from screen to screen – this badger doesn't hang around and the jaunty soundtrack helps. It's a real shame the enemy graphics are colourless (albeit detailed) Spectrumesque looking sprites. I'm sure there's a technical reason for it and it has precedent in previous* Monty *games but I was a little disappointed. All in all, it doesn't detract too much, it's just a little bugbear (or bugbadger as you will) in what is otherwise a fine game.*

While obviously paying tribute to a certain mole, the game is more Auf Wiedersehen *than* On The Run *due to its freeform, fast-paced, flowing nature. This also extends to the puzzle solving, detailed, animated, monochrome graphics and thematically fitting music. All good so far. Despite many extra lives available to collect as you explore – although reaching them is the hard part – you're likely to find the first three lives exhausted quite quickly in early plays! Easy, this is not, even with the accompanying map. A couple more extra lives to begin with would have reduced annoyance at being sent back to the start again when you die à la* Rick Dangerous. *At least there is a catapult to collect, although ammunition is limited, but it helps deal with some of the more annoying critters. After the poor review of* Auf Wiedersehen *in the past, it takes a badger to redeem this genre trope.*

P0 SNAKE

RGCD/Antoniow Savona — 2015



Beneath its flashy surface there lurks a quality new take on an old genre, and its single-button control makes it immediately pick up and playable. Each level is a puzzle, in that the starting positions are always identical, and a solution must be found to survive. With 30 levels, it will keep you going for quite a while, however as progression is the only reward once you get to the end of the game, there may not be a lot left for you to come back to for another try.

This is not *Snake*, the game of old, this is *P0 Snake* which means it's the same but it's also different (*Does that make any sense? —Ed*). Whereas you had complete control of your snake back in the day, in *P0 Snake* the fire button is the only control to change the snake's default clockwise direction to anti-clockwise. Using short sharp bursts of 'fire' gets the snake moving in a straight line. Hold down 'fire' for a little longer and the serpent effectively changes direction

The challenge is ramped up by having to avoid contact with obstacles, the screen boundary wall or even colliding with the snake's own tail. Just as with *Snake* of old, the snake's length grows as the pulsating white blobs are collected on each level and there are a set number of blobs to gather up before the game moves on to the next level.

Thankfully *P0 Snake* recognises that it can be a bit tricky to play and provides a password code system to get back to the level you were on, so you never have to replay levels unless you want to. Nothing is straightforward in this game though – the password is a combination of lefts and rights and ups and downs on the joystick.

For what is an old concept, P0 Snake is surprisingly original; I don't recall playing any other variant that puts obstacles in the way. They make all the difference; because of the game's unusual but effective one-button control, you're forced to concentrate at all times or come to an annoying end. It's testament to the game's quality that you want to hit restart instantly when a game's over. A rewarding game to play, but once P0 Snake is fully completed the incentive to come back for more is gone. Until then, though, this is a fine test of gaming skills.

Nicely presented, with speech and a bouncy tune throughout to complement the ever-moving voracious snake, this doesn't disappoint. It may not look very good in the way that, say, Planet Golf does, but it is addictive rather than frustrating. It's also unforgiving, with zero room to move in the corners particularly, but it is a brutally fair game and you know exactly why you die (repeatedly). Nice touch with the password system too since the game – never going to have depth – is a substantial challenge and you need all the help you can get. Nice simple fun.

PRESENTATION

GRAPHICS

SOUND

GRAB

LASTABILITY

OVERALL 76%

SPACEMAN SPLORF: PLANET OF DOOM

Pond — 2016

Splorf, Space Corp. Sanitation Engineer 5th Class reporting for duty. My job is crap, literally! Everyone thinks that a career working in Space is all glamour – fast ships, fast women, excitement and adventure. Well let me burst that bubble for you, some of us have to do the bum jobs – and I'm not even joking when I say that.

We all must start at the bottom but the problem for Splorf is he stayed there. It's not because he is bad at his job, in fact he is splendid at it. It's just that career advancement in Space Corp is not exactly a fast process. Maybe in another 20 years he will achieve the rank of Engineer 4th Class, but until then his number one priority is Number Twos.

All that changes when Splorf is 'volunteered' to fix the defensive system around Planet Doom. Grabbing his company-issued spanner and spluttery space suit, Splorf can only hope this may help him up the corporate ladder – how wrong he would be.

With just one button to fire the thrusters, there's no need to splay your fingers over a joystick and avoiding death is totally down to your skill. Even though it's such a simple concept, the developers have spent a great deal of time on the presentation. The cartoon-style intro is beautifully drawn, coupled with a huge selection of excellent music – both of which really add to the game's splendidness.

One-button 'runners' are reasonably prevalent on other platforms, but they've taken a little time to reach the Commodore 64, Canabalt *arguably being one of the first. The difference here is that* Splorf *looks very pretty, courtesy of Mermaid's usual wizardry, and the variety of soundtracks available means you can always pick a favourite and avoid aural boredom. However, due to too much reliance on luck and its repetitive nature it's best experienced in small doses.*

Spaceman Splorf: Planet of Doom is reminiscent of the endless 'runner' games so popular a few years ago, with more than a passing nod at *Flappy Bird*. Splorf just needs to survive – Planet Doom doesn't make this easy. The defence barrier above can splice him apart at the slightest touch, a mere splash of acidic water dissolves the spacesuit, and then there's the endless stream of meteors. Do you have the spleen to stop Splorf from going splat?

Spaceman Splorf: Planet of Doom captures the one-button simplicity really well and gives the player a unique C64 experience. It's polished, with a terrific sci-fi soundtrack. It's addictive too, at least in the beginning where the urge to get further is strong. The only issue with this, and indeed any game of this type, is its longevity. Once mastered, it's hard to motivate yourself to play from the start for potentially minimal gains. Until then, though, Splorf *is a great little time-killer.*

PRESENTATION 82%
In-game music selectable from the title screen, and two high score tables.

GRAPHICS 79%
Smooth and well-defined, but with little variety.

SOUND 92%
Eight sci-fi-inspired tunes really add to the spacey atmosphere.

HOOKABILITY 93%
You can't resist trying to get just a little further.

LASTABILITY 66%
Endless flying does eventually become tiresome.

OVERALL 73%
A fun little game, but best played in short bursts.

KNIGHT 'N' GRAIL

Psytronik/Mikael Tillander — 2009 Wide Pixel Games

You should feel sorry for Knights who live in video-game land, life just can't be fun for them. Consider this: we take it for granted that they can leap about with nary a thought, but how much time must they spend in the gym? That armour isn't light you know! The less said about lance throwing practice the better.

Their love life probably suffers as well. Their poor partners must barely see them with the amount of time they devote to pumping iron, not to mention the hours of archery practice. No wonder they get tired and careless, which inevitably ends up with a princess getting kidnapped . . . or worse.

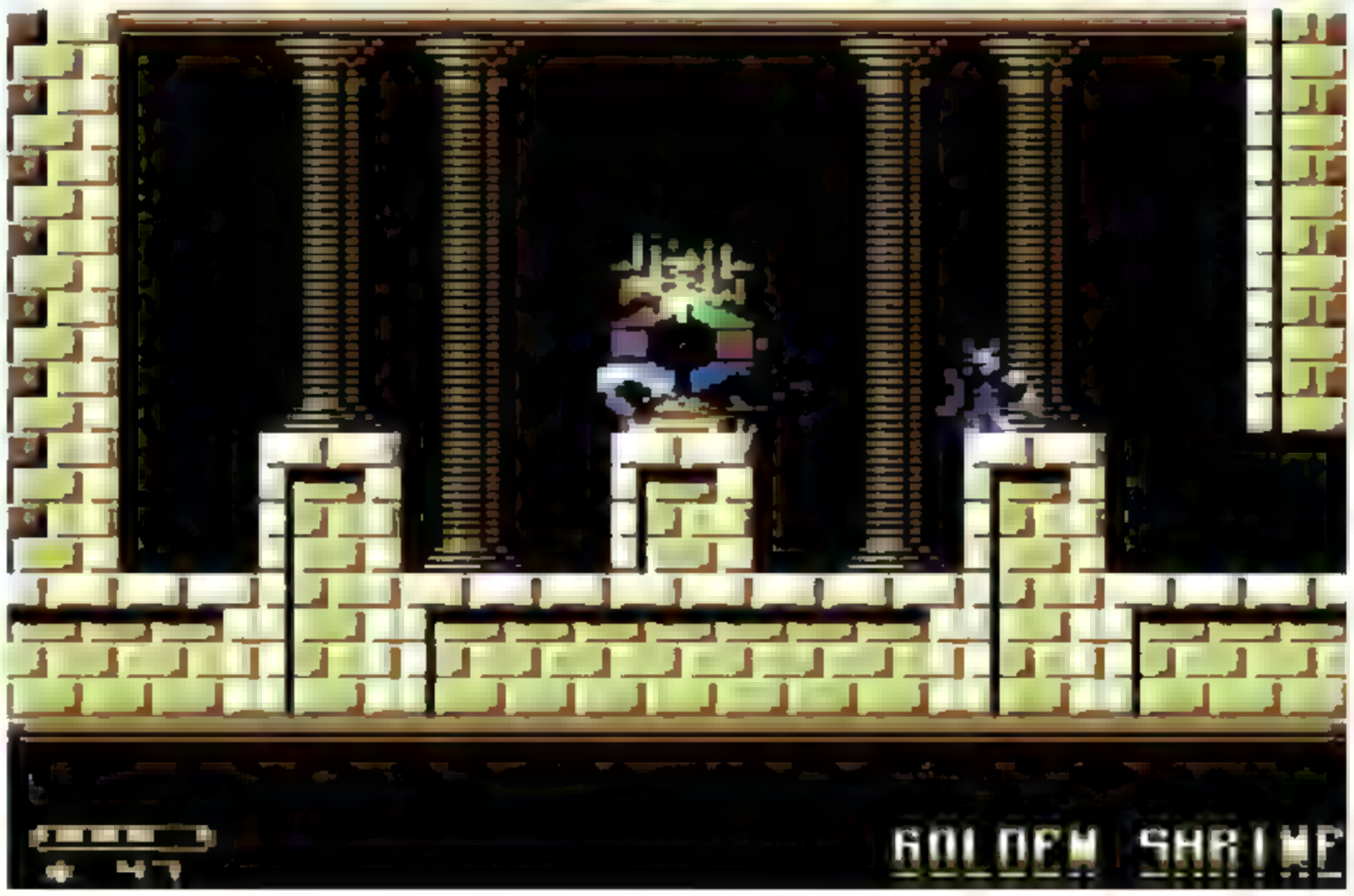
Take the unnamed knight in *Knight 'n' Grail*. He had it all – a beloved princess, pin-point sword accuracy and legs like Arnie. One slight loss of concentration while on a romantic stroll and BOOM – lightning strikes. Something jumps from the shadows and before he knows what's going on, his beloved is cursed and turns into a dragon. Only the legendary Grail can release her from the dragon form.

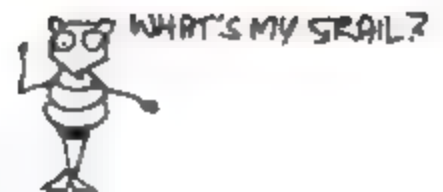
Knight 'n' Grail is a big game. With well over 200 screens, the hapless knight will be spending a lot of time traversing the castle in search of the hidden Grail, so it's as well that there are ways to speed up getting around, but he has to discover those himself. Many hazards are thrown in his path throughout his wanderings and monsters of all kinds appear without even taking the time to introduce themselves – how rude

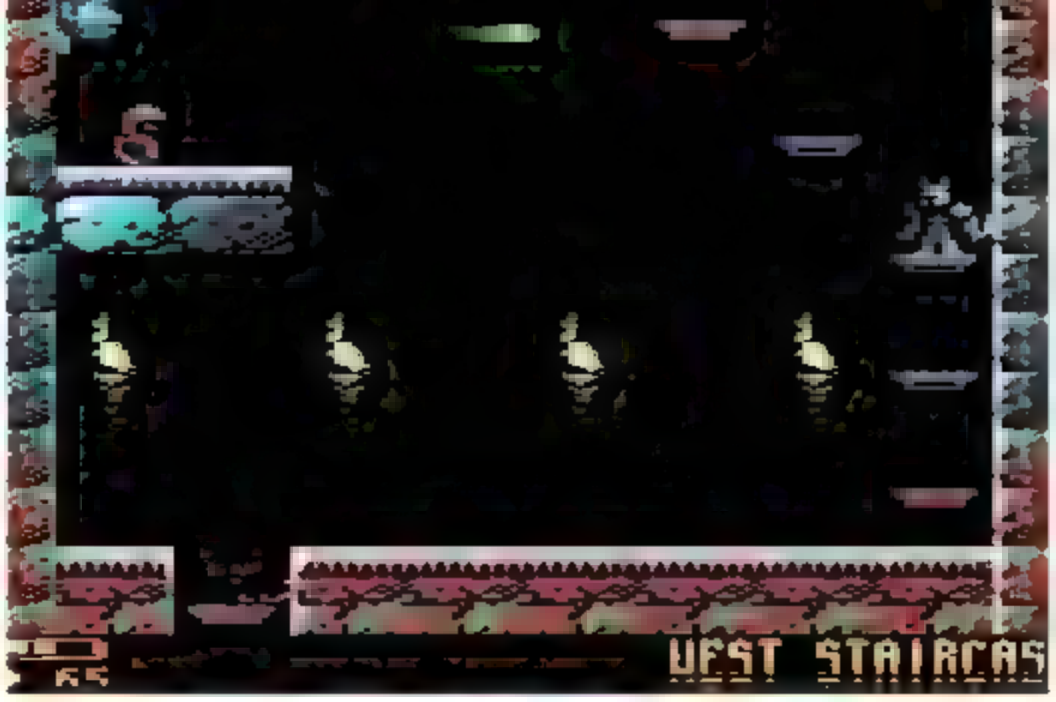
During your exploration of the

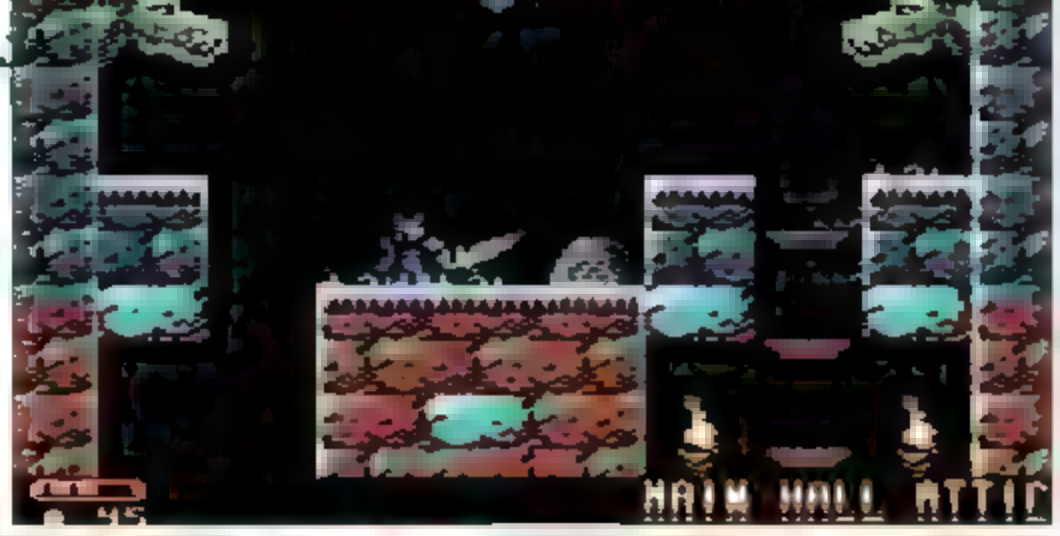
I have always been a big fan of the Metroid series, so it's always disappointed me that a game of its type was missing from the Commodore's library, and so I took to this like a moth to a flame. And it didn't disappoint. Everything you would want is present, nosing around, then utilising acquired skills to solve puzzles and find new areas. Not to mention seeing something desirable but having it lying tantalisingly out of reach to begin with, which means some backtracking later to get at it. An inventive colour-coded element system allows immunity and increased damage to enemies as you rotate your equipment, meaning no one item dominates. The only minor negatives are: it is a bit easy; there aren't nearly enough hidden items to uncover with your powers; and a cartridge release would have made the transitions a lot smoother loading wise. However, completing the game only made me want more, which is a testament to its quality.

Knight 'n' Grail's *graphics remind me of Rainbird's* Myth, *although the overall effect is let down by rather barren rooms, limited style of enemies to despatch and a somewhat pedestrian pace to the armoured hero's wandering. Sound is also limited after the initial soundtrack ends. However, to its credit, there's something about the exploring of the castle that proves rather addictive, the status screen updating the map as you explore is a lovely touch, and the runes offering cryptic clues to keep you curious while overcoming the locked doors pose a longer term challenge. The combat is simple and the game is easy enough to get into and has a simple charm of its own. It's just a real shame it's not very inspiring to look at and lacks a real sense of atmosphere.*









castle make sure that you collect as many items as you can. Many of the objects to be found will help your chivalrous character's progress into the deeper darker reaches; upgraded armour and weapons not only help survival, but are also integral to the game. The knight will need all the help you can give him because if the run-of-the-mill meanies are bad . . . wait until you meet their bosses.

I always enjoy a good arcade-adventure, so it was with some anticipation that I loaded up Knight 'n' Grail. *This reminds me, at least aesthetically, of Palace Software classics* Cauldron II *and* Antiriad. *That gets things off to a good start, as they're fine games from which to take inspiration. The gameplay is like neither of those, though. There are muted shades of* Ghosts 'n Goblins, *along with a PC game called* Rogue Legacy *(which* Knight 'n' Grail *predates by a few years). It's quite easy to make decent headway, but when you do eventually die, keeping the items you found really spurs you to jump right back in. Completing the game is quite achievable, and doing so is a lot of fun. This game is a Knight to remember!*

OVERALL 83%

30 YEARS FROM BAG TO BAG

Dear Lloyd,
In 1988 life was 8-bit. Not just 8-bit but Commodore 64 8-bit . . . and it was awesome. SID tunes, demos and the latest game releases made known by none other than a very special magazine that for all of my high school years lived in the bottom of my mate's school bag. Each issue more anticipated than the last. Every recess and lunch break it came out and we couldn't get enough of its pages and those demo tapes!

Many years have now passed (30 in fact) and it's 2018. I am still the proud owner of two C64s but instead of being in the high school yard I'm sitting at a desk in an office with a smile on my face. Why . . . ? Because nothing's changed. I don't look back on those years with a nostalgic sadness. I look back with a sense of privilege to have been part of something that has really never ended but rather found ways to touch people's lives and endure well beyond its intended era.

Believe it or not . . . ZZAP!64 is still in my bag but this time every single issue is in digital form on my trusty Samsung tablet. I can't wait to add the ZZAP!64 2019 annual to my collection . . . Life is still awesome and 8-bit!

Marc Weber, Adelaide, South Australia

Nothing's changed, huh? I used to have hair, Marc. Come to think of it quite a lot of the old ZZAP! crew used to have hair, some of it piled up like beehives in the process of a vertical takeoff. Now they're as shiny on top as a trackball.

WARLOCK IS UNDEREMULATED

Dear Lloyd Mangram,
Great to have you back in the pages of ZZAP! I've never written a letter to this fine magazine before, but maybe you can help me. Years and years ago I played this game on the C64 with my best friend. I remember the big, detailed graphics, that oh-so-real metal sound as he swung his sword (in the game, you follow?) and the tearing sound of torn flesh as evil spirits rip out of dead bodies – hah! We played this game so much and then we forgot about it. Decades later, emulators were a thing and I downloaded this game, *Nemesis the Warlock*, and had a go. Surely, this wasn't the game I played back then. My question is as follows: why did the programmers of the emulators also program these blocky, downgraded versions of the games we used to love so much? Greetings from Norway . . .

Bjørn Melbøe

PS Hmm? oh, no, nothing. I just remember letters in the mag used to end with a 'PS'.

I suppose, Bjørn, the clue is in the word 'emulator'? Tidy up too much and it isn't an emulation.

IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT...

Dear Lloyd,
A lot of time has passed since the early days of the C64. We have all become a little bit older, and some of us even became a little bit wiser.

Many have had families, and passed our love of games onto the next generation. In any case, we were all indelibly shaped by our experiences during those more innocent times. As we reflect back on our childhood, look at our parents through different eyes, and contemplate the possibility of our own mortality, can I just say SPECTRUM SUXXX, C64 RULEZZZ. Thank you

James Thomson, Glasgow

Did you say 'wiser' James? I think being rude to Speccy owners is . . . well, a touch infantile? Besides, it's generally considered to be my forte to be rude towards others, especially ZZAP! RRAPPERS. Go and stand in the corner and repeat a hundred times: 'I will not be rude to Speccy owners.' (Just kidding . . .)

WHO STOLE THE CRENELLATIONS?

Dear Lloyd,
Can I just say how fantastic it is to have ZZAP!64 back after all these years. It's like an old friend you haven't seen for 30 years stepping back into your life.

When I heard that ZZAP! was coming back, I contacted an old friend of mine from the C64 days, Gav, to tell him the good news. In the conversation that followed, we decided to do something that we'd always talked about doing as kids but never did – make a pilgrimage to ZZAP! Towers. We agreed a date, looked up the address (1-2 King Street) and agreed to meet in Ludlow at two o'clock. I came off the phone and wrote 'Totally Zanjaz Trip to ZZAP! Towers' on the calendar – much to the bemusement of the wife and kids.

The sun was shining when the day arrived, and I set off very excited about visiting the mythical ZZAP! Towers. As I drove down the A49 into Shropshire I thought about what I would say if I bumped into any of the ZZAP! superstars of my youth. Julian Rignall, Gary Penn, Roger Kean and Oliver Frey. What would I say or do if I did? Maybe I'd be too nervous to say anything.

I met Gav just before two at a hotel on the outskirts of Ludlow. We left the cars, deciding to walk into town heading for 1-2 King Street. It was a bright sunny day and as we walked we talked about how great it was going to be to finally visit the legendary ZZAP! Towers and hopefully meet a few of our childhood heroes.

At first, when we found it, I thought we'd got the wrong address. 'This can't be it,' I said as we stood outside a rather non-descript building in the middle of town. The ground floor was home to a shop called Gifts and Chocolate (which was closing down) while the upper floors were

Photo: Oliver Frey

■ Roger Kean holds the blue plaque commemorating the Newsfield years at 1–2 King Street. Martin Grundy (left) and Gav visited Ludlow too soon to see it in place on the alley wall.

just offices with windows which overlooked the street.

'This is definitely it,' said Gav, showing me the map on his phone, 'Look, 1-2 King Street'.

'But . . . But . . .' I stammered, 'This isn't right! Where's the drawbridge . . . and the crumbing ancient walls . . ? Where's the moat and the . . . er . . . turrets?' I said 'Where's the Scorelord and the White Wizard?' My voice trailed away. 'This can't be it, can it?' I added pathetically, but the reality was already beginning to sink in ZZAP! Towers wasn't the Lord of the Rings style citadel I'd imagined it to be. Instead it was a group of offices housed on the second and third floors of a building in the middle of town situated above a gift shop and next door to a bank. I must admit, it was a little disappointing

I cheered myself up with the hope that we still might be able to catch a couple of the ZZAP! legends up there in the offices, hurriedly working away on the new ZZAP!64 annual. No doubt Lloyd Mangram would be up there hunched over an Apricot computer, while next to him would be Julian Rignall simultaneously munching pot noodles, smoking endless cigarettes and racking up a ridiculously high score on *Dropzone*. In the corner might be Andrew Braybrook, Archer Maclean, Tony Crowther and Jeff Minter sat in front of a C64 getting some practice in ahead of the latest ZZAP! programmers' challenge.

Yet such hopes were quickly dashed. What must've once been the entrance to Zzap! Towers, down the side of the building, was locked and looked like it hadn't been opened for many years. Despite hammering on it for a good five minutes, shouting 'ROGER! OLI! JAZ! GAZ! . . . errr . . . ROCKFORD!' nobody answered. There was no sign of Sumner, not even a hint of Houghton and looking for Lloyd was proving to be a futile activity

Feeling somewhat deflated, Gav and I wandered back to the front of the building and took a few photos of the old 'ZZAP! Towers'; at which point the shopkeeper came out of Gifts and Chocolate and asked us what we were doing. We hastily explained that we weren't 'casing the joint' (Gav's words not mine) but that we'd made a pilgrimage of hundreds of miles to visit the legendary ZZAP! Towers. He'd never heard of ZZAP! and when we asked if he had access to the offices above (maybe there'd be some remnants of the ZZAP! era still in there) he said not and advised us that the offices now belonged to the bank next door and that it probably wasn't a good idea to take photos of them. We thanked him and asked if he'd take a photo of us outside ZZAP! Towers. He was happy to oblige.

The shopkeeper went back to selling gifts and chocolates, and Gav and I stood there for a few minutes on the pavement, looking up at the old Newsfield HQ and remembering those great early years of gaming, imagining what it must've been like inside the ZZAP! offices. It was here that the brilliance of ZZAP!64 was created month in month out. This was the hub of the C64 games scene in the 1980s and although it may not have been what I expected, the old ZZAP! Towers still held a certain nostalgic magic.

After a few minutes of misty-eyed reminiscing, Gav and I decided to do what numerous ZZAP! staffers did many years ago. Leaving 1 2 King Street behind, we headed down the road towards the Bull Hotel for a drink. Our intention was to toast not only the ZZAP!64 of the past but also the ZZAP!64 annual of today and the magazine's future.

'To ZZAP!'

Martin C Grundy, Bolton

The window immediately above your head, Martin, is the one from which Gary Liddon suspended Roger Kean's three-ton 9-station office phone, threatening any customer entering or leaving what used to be Victoria Wine in the 1980s. Liddon was never charged with the offence because he pleaded innocence (and lack of witnesses to the crime).

We removed the turrets and moat to Case Mill when Newsfield moved there in 1990 because Barclays didn't want them.

LM

■ Case Mill never gets much of a mention in the Newsfield story, but ZZAP!64 was put together here for almost three years and later as *Commodore Force* after it. The slaves worked in the Mill itself (the ground floor was occupied by an inventor), while the suits occupied the two floors of comfortable offices off to the right. The photo dates from October 2012

WHAT ARE BEST FRIENDS FOR?

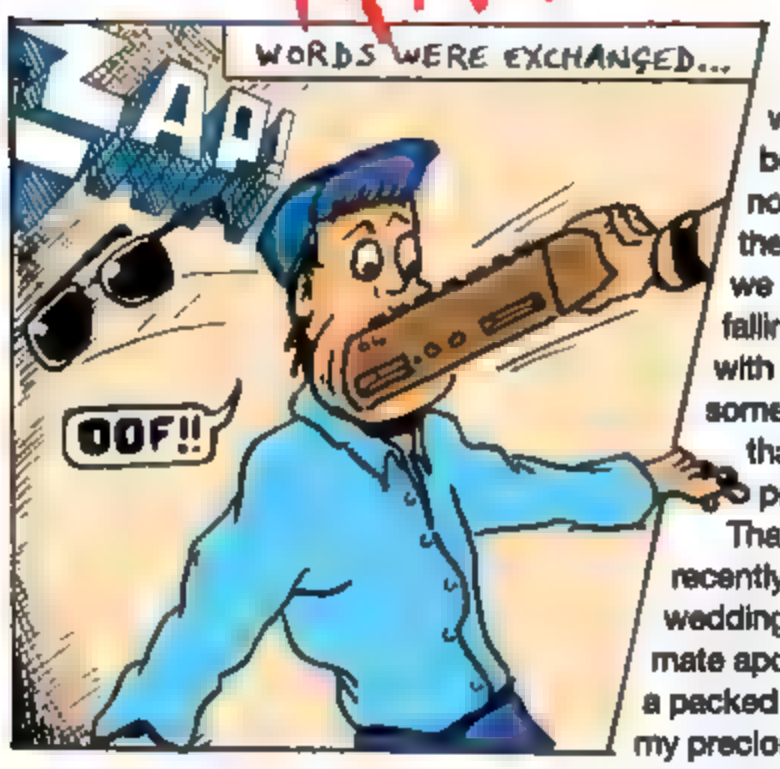
Dear Lloyd,

I recently achieved closure with regards to an issue that has divided a group of friends for years but has kept ZZAP!64 a part of my life long after the sad day of its final issue.

During the late 1980s I was the proud owner of a C64 and a healthy back catalogue of ZZAPs. My best friend foolishly only had an Amstrad CPC 464 and looked on enviously at my superior gaming experience and print media. I thought nothing

Photo: Roger Kean

ZZAP! RRAP



of it when he asked to borrow a few editions of ZZAP! given how amazing the magazine was.

A few weeks after returning the magazines I found myself in his bedroom and caught myself admiring the fine, oddly familiar posters on his bedroom wall. It was only when I spotted the ZZAP! logo did I realise what he had done. Worse still, I spotted the map to *Treasure Island Dizzy* had also been stuck up but not before he had used pen to mark all of the items he had collected on his version of the game!

As you would expect, words were exchanged, accusations were thrown and doors were slammed. Weeks passed before we spoke again but things were not the same. In the ensuing years we had many more fallings out, always with a sense there was some underlying issue that we could never properly resolve.

That was until just recently when, during his wedding speech, my best mate apologised in front of a packed room for stealing my precious *ZZAP!* posters and for vandalising the *Dizzy* map. It felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. That said, I still haven't had the posters back, which I means I need to have words with him about it.

Chris, Reigate, Surrey

Good grief and little Dim Dim fishes! How could anyone with half a brain deface a ZZAP! MMAP and hope to get away with it. Especially one foolish enough to own an Amstrad. Chris, you should have reported your best mate to the OTTPFDP! (Oliver Twins Thought Police For Dizzy Poster Infringement)

LM

A GAMER'S BURNING SHAME

Dear Floyd,

ZZAP! issues 29-33 featured my Mum in the Scorelord's High Scoring Heroes section for one of my favourite games: Dragon's Lair. This was at the consternation of both my C64 owning friends and myself since (in comparison to some of the more dubious or exaggerated claims) this was a truly legitimate high score.

In those heady days before mobile phones a school friend called at the start of my attempt to clock my previous high score and while I fielded the call my Mum took over and put my previous efforts to shame, having only ever observed previous runs.

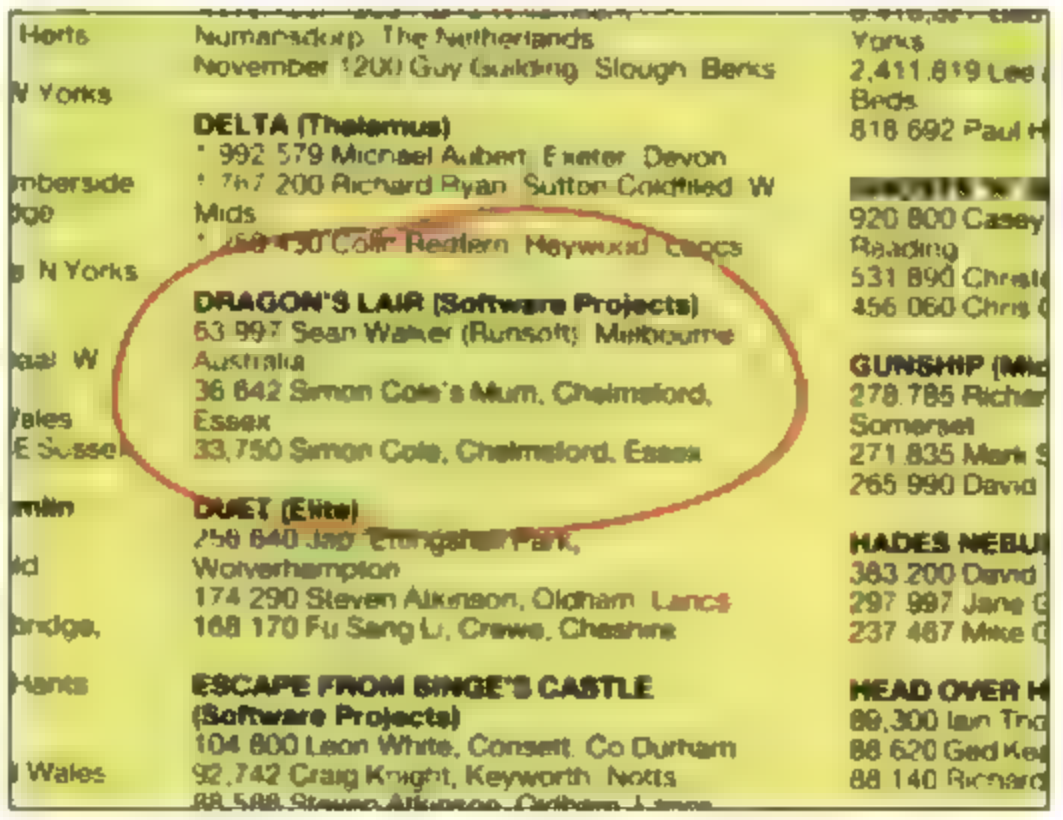
She still has her gaming chops, having recently completed a flawless run on *Crash Bandicoot's* Hog Racing section on the PS4.

Once a gamer . . .

Simon Cole, London
(aka Simon Cole's Mum's Son)

How honest you were, Simon, so much so I might have awarded you Letter of the Year . . . except for the fact that you called me Floyd. Is your mother still beating you? Preferably on your backside.

LM



SLOBBER IV

Dear Lloyd,
The slobberslabberdingdangdo
Biggin (Nottingham)
Death Threat III. I thought we agreed: no more slabberers, otherwise I'll hurl you from one of your 10 windows!
LM

MORE WORK FOR MOI

Hi Lloyd,

As it's been a very long time since the last Top 100 of C64 games, can another be done for next year's annual? Lots of great games have been released in the last 25 years.

Daren Wood, Parts unknown

I'll pass on your request to the Powers That Be and see if they will offer me fiduciary inducement for such an enormous task.

LM

NEWSFIELD'S HISTORY!

Dear Readers,

Well IT all started in 1985, Live Aid, Sinclair C5, first mobile phone call in the UK, *Back to the Future* . . . I could go on, but the most important thing was a new magazine that arrived for the humble Commodore 64. Yes! ZZAP!64! This changed everything. A new way to look at new game reviews from so called experts, lol. However, it helped me make the right game purchases and spend hard earned pocket money wisely (washing cars/paper rounds). While my best friend and I sat on my doorstep perusing the latest issue after a hard game of one-foot down we knew what we had to go shopping for next. Every little helps as they say, and the future was written for many years by the Newsfield team, now history itself. I'm looking forward to the ZZAP!64 Annual 2019 to bring it all back and for my best friend, whose dad chucked all his collection of *ZZAP!64* in a skip. So thank you all and bring on September 2018!

Gary Cole, Kent

Your poor, poor best friend. What a pain dads can be! ZZAP! in a skip – that's just appalling.

LM

GREETINGS FROM AUSTRALIA

I am so looking forward to the ZZAP!64 Annual 2019 that I have been re-reading all my old ZZAP!s and have been lost in the good old days. I hope you will review some of the more recent games for the greatest machine ever made – there have been so many it's hard to keep up.

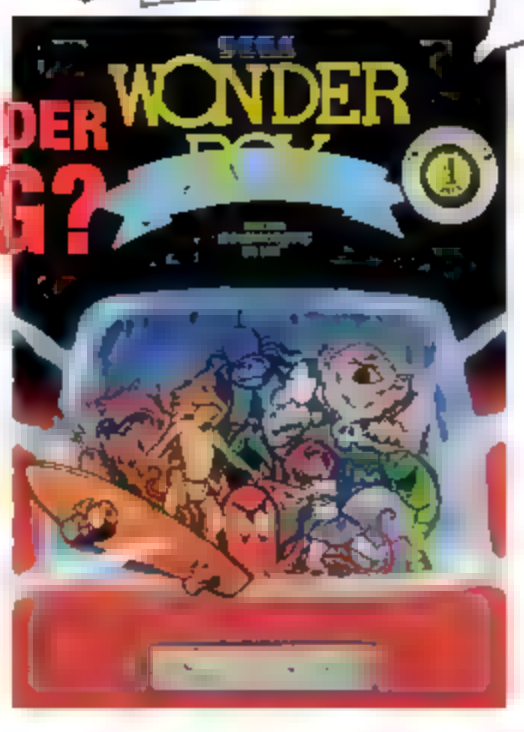
Cheers, and bring on 2019!

John

Space is always on the short side in a single-issue annual, but I think you'll find the reviewing team has done a good job of examining games dating back to about 2011 onwards.

LM

BOY! IS IT ANY WONDER I'M FUMING?



Hi Lloyd,

I've waited a long time to say this – 31 years to be exact – and wild horses will simply not stop me now. I am still utterly **FURIOUS**, and for three decades have told everyone from doctors to psychologists to corner-store owners about my concerns. I am sure they all agree with me (although they didn't come right out and say it.) But I consider myself a pretty damn good reader of behaviour and I know they concur, strongly, with my position.

Which is, wondering how on **EARTH** could you give such a fiendishly playable and brilliant game port as *Wonder Boy* the paltry and deeply offensive score of 52% [issue 28] when it deserved at least a Sizzler? I mean, were you guys collectively high that day on overheated silicon fumes due to the cramped nature of the ZZAP! offices? Were the joysticks improperly wired and sending voltage spurts up your arms and into your brains? I mean, how could you fail to experience what I and scores of my school friends did when we would fight feverishly over the single original copy doing the rounds. How **COULD YOU POSSIBLY DO SUCH A THING** and hurt and traumatise us so deeply? We looked up to you guys ... second parents!

I patiently await your response. I hope I do not have to wait another 31 years to do so but alas, I so fervently believe in this criminal injustice undeservingly delivered unto such an outstanding work of genius that I will even wait until the next annual or, if one never comes out, will on my deathbed hastily cross out the offensive 52% in text and replace it with the more appropriate 90% with the word SIZZLER! written above in shaky handwriting, because that's probably how my hands will be at that point. Hopefully though, with your help, it will never have to get to that stage. So please, right this terrible wrong, for your sake and mine, and for my many school friends who shared my same passionate viewpoint, many of whom are now probably dead.

Robert Roemer

Well Robert (and some of your dead friends), I see Paul Sumner liked Wonder Boy *(a bit), while Steve and Julian didn't much – in fact Jaz thought the arcade original wasn't 'exactly brilliant'. So I guess this affected the game's score. However on digging deeply into the past, I discovered that Gary Penn abstained a view and all the others have since decided it's only fair to blame Ciarán Brennan, who was a newbie assistant editor at the time, having come across from LM magazine SO – taking life and limb in hand – I offer Ciarán's heartfelt apology for so upsetting you and your passionate friends.*

But you are off the beat in blaming overheated silicon fumes. ZZAP! Towers would have been rocking to the exhaust fumes of stumblies' (tourists) cars crawling along King Street outside in June (when the August issue 28 would have been under production). There! Maybe you should blame planet-killing global warming on the poor result for Wonder Boy.

LM

DID YOU KNOW THAT ZZAP!64 HAD AN UGLY SISTER?

Dear Lloyd,

I have finally put my contribution onto Kickstarter. Was a bit slow. Damn, I wish I had known earlier about getting the *Cybernoid* music as a vinyl record if you contributed really early – that is so cool it is almost worth buying a record player just to play it! Oh well, I get a nice ZZAP!64 mug to drink my coffee with in the mornings, which is a nice addition to my other retro-themed mugs.

Thanks also to whoever it was who posted the link to the video *The Newsfield Years* – I watched that last night and it was great to hear the backstory behind ZZAP! and friends! As a loyal C64 user, of course I can only say 'and friends' and cannot say the name of ZZAP!'s sister magazine or that awful computer that it was written for – that would be a terrible break with time honoured tradition. I was surprised to find there was also an Amstrad CPC version of the mag as well.

It is great to see ZZAP!64 (and its ugly stepsister) still alive in the year 2018, even just for a one off. After following this group and seeing the video, I am really looking forward to getting my copy!

I'm still annoyed about missing out on *Cybernoid* though!

Colin Ward

PS Here's the link to The Newsfield Years for those who haven't yet seen it. Well worth a watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCWjGvz9vyk
Or: https://vimeo.com/31517101

As the stills taken from the opening of Anthony and Nicola Caulfield's The Newsfield Years *indicate, there was indeed AMTIX! magazine for the Amstrad (as well as – ssshh – CRASH).*

It still smarts that the documentary film-makers didn't send me the call to appear in the 25-minute exposé of how it all happened. I mean, they even got that pipsqueak reviewer Matthew Uffindell involved!!

LM

SAM'S JOURNEY

2019

Knights of Bytes / Protovision — 2017

- Features 19 tunes
- Fast free-directional scrolling
- 2,000 screens over 27 huge levels

Sam's Journey has been a long and weary one. It was initially considered to be an April Fools' joke before finally being accepted by the C64 scene as *The Boy Who Would Be King*. With online retro news sites originally declaring the game a hoax, released screenshots were eyed suspiciously by C64 fans previously burned by a ZZAP! Towers prank in 1986 that announced another technical marvel – *Mindsmear*.

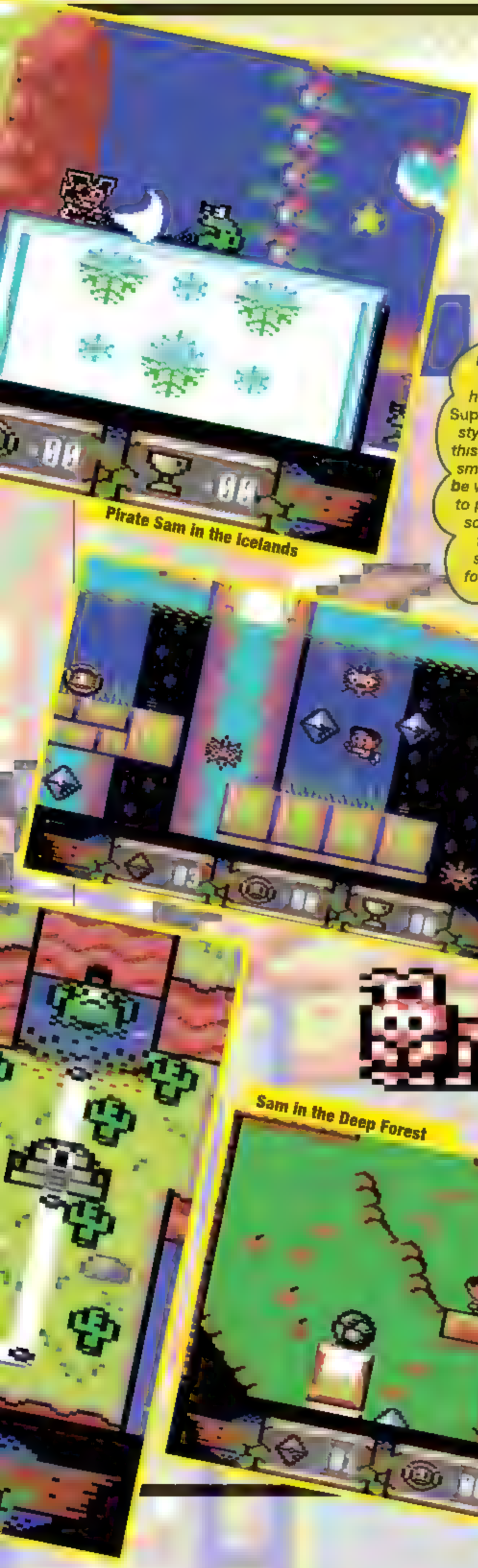
Sam therefore initially started out his travels on rocky ground facing insurmountable odds. Becoming increasingly sure footed as the months progressed, and buoyed by a steady drip feed of updates from developers Knights of Bytes, Sam finally sprinted the final leg to physical release on Christmas Eve 2017.

So, what does the prodigal son arrive with in his traveller's knapsack? In a nutshell it's a scrolling platform game. Sam has clearly taken a detour on his travels to Tokyo, soaking up influences and learning tricks from Nintendo and Sega's mascots. He's also expanded his wardrobe from the initial t-shirt, jeans and trainers ensemble to embracing capes from Transylvania, Ninja robes from Japan, Pirate garb from the seven seas and err ... um ... a rhinestone jumpsuit from Graceland. The costumes have their own powers and change Sam's appearance as well as providing the young hero with additional skills.

To call *Sam's Journey* just a platform game does it a massive disservice. It's huge, traversing 2,000 screens that look determined to test the C64's palette to the limit – just check out the colour in the screens on these pages.

Each of the 27 levels contains a horde of beasties out to prevent Sam in his quest as he leaps, climbs, flies, swims and jetpacks to avoid them. Sam's Journey is undoubtedly a game on an already travelled road, but with great tour guides such as Knights of Bytes there are always new wonders to behold.

ZZAP! TEST



In a word, brilliant. What a lovely game Sam's Journey *is. Paying homage to classic platformers like* Super Mario World *and with a graphical style reminiscent of* Rainbow Islands, *this is a real delight to play. It made me smile every time I played. As it should be with this type of game, it's very easy to pick up and make progress but you soon realise how challenging it is to find all the hidden treasures and secret routes. (Cruelly underlined for proud as punch me after getting through five multi-stage levels only to be met with a paltry 7% completed!) There's an immense challenge right there to get 100%. Thankfully the save-game feature on completing a level stopped me from total game rage – rage I should add that's down to my ineptitude in mistiming jumps or embracing the deadly (but cute) enemies and not the game being unfair in any way. The design of each level is excellent. You can make firm but fair progress through to the end of each level but en route you see treasures which you have no idea how to get to, until you start exploring and stumble across a secret passageway or the occasional well needed checkpoint. The costumes are a nice touch and give Sam distinctly different abilities with each one. Although I managed to progress without using their special abilities much at first, I did need certain ones to get past some areas. As I progressed, new demands on my platforming skills came into play and as I leapt, climbed, dodged and bounced it took me back to classic console and C64 gameplay. All in all they've captured that core old-school playability really well. The accompanying soundtrack is really catchy and the colours are vibrant throughout; there's a pleasant introductory story and nice touches like new enemies coming into play on later levels with different attack patterns to make sure you don't get complacent. Sam's Journey is a well rounded, solid, quality platformer with enough to keep you playing for a long while. I thoroughly recommend it.*

TEST

It only took two years for the Commodore to receive a Sonic clone, in the form of Mayhem. Arguably it's taken 30 years to receive something approaching Nintendo's magnum opus. I'll let you decide if that's entry 3 or 4 in the series!

Put simply this is an homage to one of the pinnacles of gaming excellence. Made with both love and malice, it constantly shows you things just out of reach and demands you find a way there, let alone that first 'eureka' moment when you realise you need to move a switch before triggering it... And this is only a mere indicator of how convoluted, clever and conniving the construction of each level is. The varied costumes Sam can acquire have a hand in it, working in tandem with dollops of exploration and backtracking. Although sometimes it's nice to don the Pirate costume just for bludgeoning your way through!

Such is the hook of playing that I wasn't content with immediately reaching the end of each level. From the word go Sam's Journey entices you to explore and discover what you can acquire, all helped by responsive controls and the facility of restarting from the last checkpoint, which eases frustration – especially if you are aiming for that magical 100% rating.

I haven't even got to the charm-filled stunning graphics or ludicrously catchy in-game themes yet, or the underwater sections, or the Mario-esque moving platform hell, or the bosses, or the... you get the picture. It's a half-megabyte of pure wonder and enjoyment, built in Nintendo sandbox terms of 'here's the world, go play with it'. Combine the colourful map, costumes, switches, climbing nets, throwable items, level themes, locked doors, secrets and more, and you can see why each game preview released during development increased the hype. The problem with hype though is living up to expectation, and in this Sam's Journey *more than matches its billing.*

GET SAM JUMPING!

- Sam has so many moves that it's quite easy to miss some! Push and hold FIRE to start peeking, then push UP or DOWN to see what's above or below. Hold FIRE and push UP to jump off vines. Hold DOWN and push FIRE to drop an item exactly at Sam's spot. Oh and not every switch is nailed to the ground.
- Not only can Pikeho Sam toss items with a targeted throw, he can also walk safely on ice without slithering.
- When Vampire Sam turns into a bat, he can fly much longer distances if you collect items on the way.
- There are 40 diamonds, 10 coins and 3 trophies hidden in every level of Sam's Journey. Can you find them all?
- Perform Diesel Sam's twisting move to stomp more resistant enemies.
- With his jetpack, Space Sam can almost double his jump distance and height.

There are many games that can lay claim to the title of Best C64 Game Of All Time. From Paradroid *in the early days to* Mayhem in Monsterland *at the machine's commercial end, there were many releases destined to be argued over in polls until the end of time. Now there's another game to throw into the mix:* Sam's Journey.

It's astonishing what the programmers have achieved here. The game is massive, surely the biggest game of its type on the 64. Size isn't everything, of course, but this plays like a dream. First, and most importantly, it controls beautifully. Jumping isn't floaty like many such games, and with silky smooth scrolling, bags of great music and sound effects it has the feel of a console game. The different outfits add much to the gameplay, and with so many puzzles to solve and secret areas to find you'll be playing for a very long time. Sam's Journey may be expensive, but you still get more than your money's worth. Outstanding

PRESENTATION 98%
Great packaging (physical release) the game does everything right.

GRAPHICS 97%
Beautifully drawn, animated sprites, excellent varied backdrops gorgeous map screen.

SOUND 94%
A number of quality tunes, complemented by good sound effects.

HOOKABILITY 98%
Instantly enjoyable platform action you can't tear yourself away from.

LASTABILITY 98%
An enormous game, and even if you complete it you'll want to go back to try and get 100% every level.

OVERALL 98%
One of the best Commodore 64 games ever – Simples.

THE WORLD IS
DEVASTATED.
AND ON THE BRINK OF
TOTAL DESTRUCTION.
YOU ARE MANKIND'S
LAST HOPE.
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MICRO HEXAGON

Paul 'Demake' Koller makes a name for himself translating standout mobile titles to the C64, and after the success of C64anabalt *and* Super Bread Box, *I was intrigued to see what he would do next. Having somehow avoided knowing about* Super Hexagon *prior to pledging for the related Kickstarter, it was blatantly obvious it was the sort of twitchy reaction puzzle-arcade game that was right up my street. In terms of performance the execution is superb, with an incredible frame rate, fast pace, responsive controls, and a terrific rendition of the original soundtrack pushing you along. It is nonetheless solely a 'score' attack game and one best suited to small bursts at a time – partly due to frustration over one mistake ending the game, partly due to its repetitive nature, and partly due to assaulting your eyes with so much going on at once!*

Originally conceived as an entry to the RGCD 16KB cart competition, Paul 'King of the Demake' Koller (*C64anabalt*, *SuperBreadBox*, and *LuftrauserZ*) delivers the ultimate in twitch gaming. Based on the popular *Super Hexagon* iOS/Android game, this title proves that the C64 can hold its own among modern platforms.

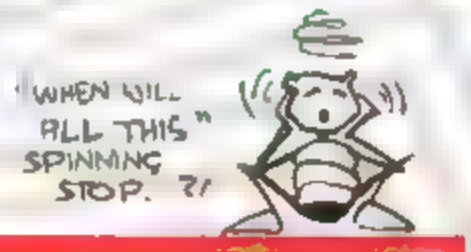
Micro Hexagon is a game with no backstory, no characters, no narration and no plot. It's not a puzzle game either, more a test of ability and patience – the sort of game in which you can show off your skill to other people. It promotes one upmanship – a sense of higher purpose, of being in the zone, at one with the machine. It also encourages others to express that they're worried about you and to suggest that maybe a bar of soap might be the order of the day.

The entire point of *Micro Hexagon* is to move a dot around the exterior of a hexagon in order to avoid walls that are continuously contracting inwards toward the dot. And that's it – forever . . .

It's a game that, instead of using graphics to appeal to the eye – to draw the player in and encourage further play and exploration – uses them in an attempt to make you fail in your task by punching you in the optic nerve, by making your eyes feel like they're melting – like your retinas are slowly starting to burn as the spiralling, flashing, pulsing imagery does its utmost to prevent you from protecting your precious little dot from ultimate destruction, crushed between the hexagonal centre and the relentless walls. It even comes with a health warning! Seriously!

Mix in with the dazzling, dazing graphic display a pummelling techno track, and you're well on the way to a banger of a headache!

I played Super Hexagon *on the PC until my eyes were almost bleeding and if you've ever played it, you'll know exactly what I mean. If you haven't, you might as well grab this Commodore 64 version because it's pretty much the same. It's an incredibly simplistic game, but very, very compulsive . . . at least, to begin with. The main (only) problem is that there's* **only** *one thing to do: survive for as long as possible by steering left or right. That's fine up to a point, but the game's deliberately eye-wrenching graphics make it unsuitable for long play sessions. As a high-score game played in short bursts, though,* Micro Hexagon *hits the spot.*



PRESENTATION 10%

GRAPHICS 8%

SOUND 8%

LOOKABILITY 8%

PLAYABILITY 8%

OVERALL 70%

SHEEPOID

Psytronik/Richard Bayliss — 2011

Sheep in space – great loading screen by Steve Day

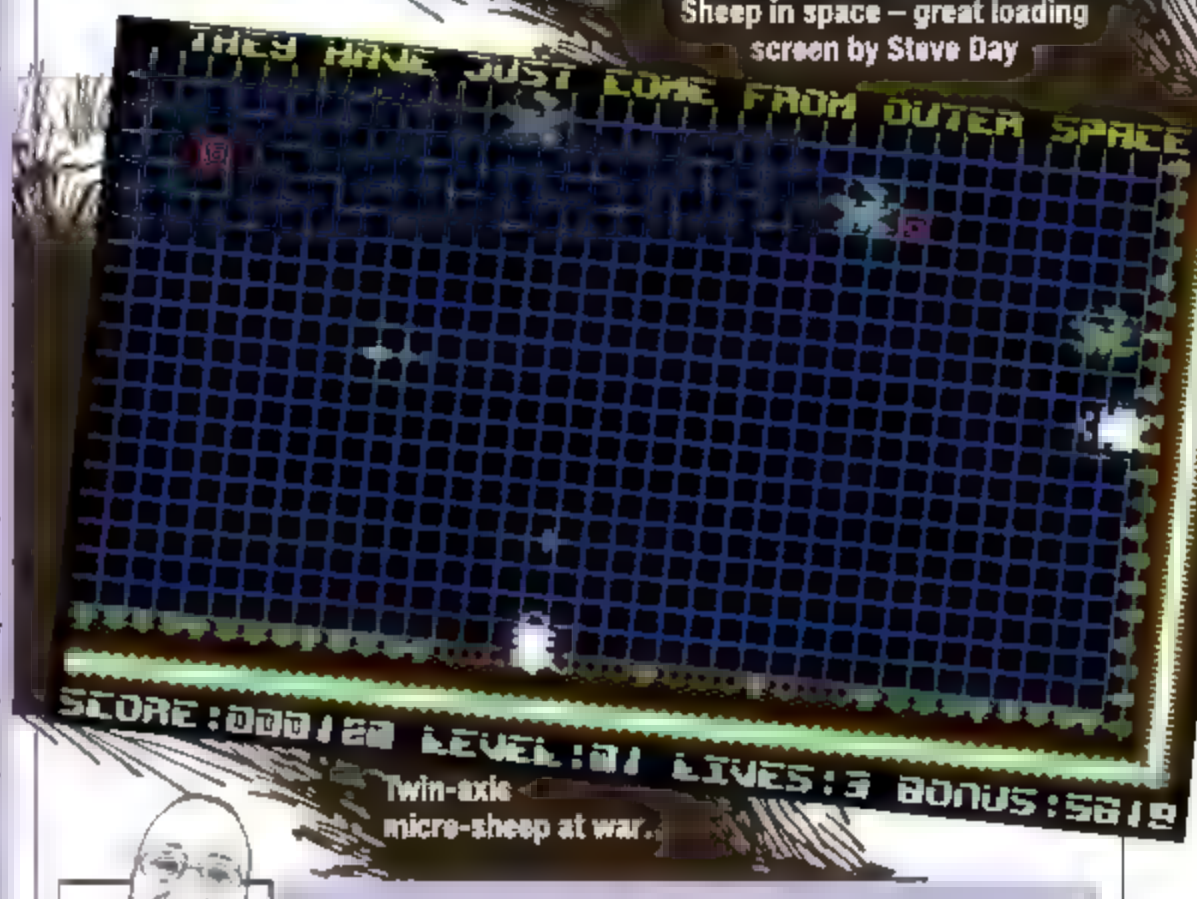
All is not well in the ungulate paradise of Neon Vortex, invaders are using every tactic in the book to destroy this psychedelic heaven... then again, they may just be trying to return a library book. Enter two brave – or perhaps very stoned – micro-sheep. They are the only ones standing between Neon Vortex and utter, colourful destruction.

Sheepoid is very much a tribute to Jeff Minter's 1983 classic *Laser Zone*. Core gameplay is exactly as one would expect; the two micro-sheep are independently controlled using each axis of the joystick but act as one when the fire button is mashed. The skill is knowing which sheep to move in a situation, which is made ever trickier when the invaders are anything but predictable.

In a plot twist worthy of the best 1980s B movie, somebody in the Neon Vortex nursery left the gate open letting baby sheep (micro-lambs?) wander into the Vortex. Whatever you do, do not shoot them – the penalties are severe: lose 1000 points and get a stern letter from the headmistress. Oblivious to the problems they cause, wave after wave of invaders keep coming until defeat is inevitable . . . only now it's time to deploy the secret weapon.

Sheepoid is an obvious homage to one of Commodore's favourite sons, Jeff Minter, taking the gameplay of Laser Zone and combining it with wacky graphics and titles like Revenge of the Mutant Camels. *Not much is different, still taking a steady eye or three to co-ordinate both guns simultaneously, although it attempts to vary things by having non-linear enemy attack patterns towards either axis. But for all the wonder of the colourful graphics and noises, it does take a step or two backwards. It seems easier, maybe the firing rate, or just where the enemies appear off screen, and I found no way to dispatch an enemy that landed and was making its way towards one of the guns – compounded by a lack of super zapper. The fact is, if you're going to remake a game then make it better than the original, and sadly* Sheepoid *does not succeed here.*

Once per level the sheep, with a little tickle on the C64's space bar, can detonate a Smart Bomb that decimates their enemies. Beware, somebody forgot to turn on the friend or foe circuits so any baby sheep in the vicinity when the bomb goes off will become tomorrow's lamb chops



Twin-axis micro-sheep at war.

Sheepoid wears its influences on the sleeve of its woolly jumper right from the outset. It's clearly an homage to the fluffiest programmer of them all, Jeff Minter. In fact, it's pretty much a reskinned version of one of Yak's earliest efforts, Laser Zone. *It retains the feel of that game quite well, with the 'pat your head while you rub your stomach' gameplay still serving to confuse the unwitting player at a moment's notice. Unfortunately, if you're going to remake an old classic, you really have to go the extra mile to make it shine.* Sheepoid *was released 28 years after* Laser Zone *but you could easily mistake it as a rip off from the time. Perhaps that was the aim. With much improved graphics or new gameplay features,* Sheepoid *could have been a winner. As it is, you may as well stick with the original.*

PRESENTATION 80%
Variety of disk options, including a bonus game of dubious quality.

GRAPHICS 63%
Some impressive aspects, but basic sprites let the side down.

SOUND 76%
An up-tempo title tune gives way to suitably Minter-esque effects.

HOOKABILITY 70%

LASTABILITY 48%
own right to warrant extended play.

OVERALL 54%

Intentionally derivative blaster evokes fond memories, but doesn't better its inspiration.

SIZLER

GALENCIA

The smells and sounds of summer are now but a distant memory; the rays of warm sunshine hitting your bare skin; the smell of lavender on the gentle breeze and bees busily buzzing from flower to flower . . . hang on, didn't there used to be way more bees?

Thankfully for the survival of humanity (bees are really important to nature, don't you know!) we are not the only ones who have noticed that the bee population is being depleted. The Guardians from planet Yenoh, who populated the Earth with bees over three million years ago, have been watching how us naughty peeps have practically wiped them out – and boy is it going to be a sting in the tail for us. ('sting'? 'bees'? *Get your coat, you're fired – Ed*)

Don't delay, jump into the flight suit of Ace Harper to defend the Earth and restore peace. Be careful though, Guardians twist and turn above your ship doing their best to avoid your bullets while zeroing in on your position

Arcade clones were all the rage in the early 80s, so you'd think that any released now would have totally missed the boat. You'd be wrong, though, because Galencia is the best Galaga clone ever seen on the 8-bits. Programmer Jay Aldred has taken the arcade classic, added several new features and delivered a challenging, exciting shoot 'em up. Galencia has the same core as its inspiration, and adds a few tricks of its own which freshen it up and keep things interesting. The bonus rounds are more varied, as are the rewards, which encourage risk-taking in the pursuit of higher scores. There are also bosses to tackle. If you're good enough to reach them. The difficulty level is perfectly judged, increasing accordingly as you progress, which encourages repeated play. If you're a shoot 'em up fan, you need to buy Galencia – it's easily the best of its type.

While Galencia cribs aspects of gameplay from both Galaga and Gaplus and then homogenises them into a significant coherent challenge, it's also unafraid of throwing in some new ideas of its own. You won't be beating this one in a few sittings! Like all good games, the more you play, the more you understand the concepts of what makes it tick, and gradually improve. The bonus sections are nicely mixed up, if not original, with a perfect risk reward structure to obtain significant points. Collision detection occasionally feels a little unfair, not helped by the abstract attack patterns of some of the aliens among what would traditionally be a vertical orientation game, but all isn't fair in love and war. It's a minor blemish on a superbly put together tribute to old school shooters of the Golden Era of arcades, one that any respecting fan should play.

Over the years, there have been numerous Galaga-style games for the C64, but don't ask me to name any. Their unfortunate mediocrity has ensured that they've long since washed from my mind like so much gaming flotsam and jetsam. I don't think that will be true of Galencia, however. Clearly inspired by Namco's Golden Age of Arcades classic, this brand new release is a terrific take on the original 1981 coin-op that won't be forgotten in a hurry. Technically, it's stunning. Legions of bright and colourful aliens swoop and swirl around the screen with nary a flicker in sight as you try to blast them into smithereens.

*Sure, it's supremely simple **stuff**, but it's the sort of timeless shoot 'em **up** action that keeps you repeated**ly** coming back for more. As you **prog**ress, there are bonus stages **and** new types of enemies to challenge you, and the going certainly gets tough – but never overwhelmingly so. My only gripe is that it's sometimes difficult to see incoming alien bullets against the scrolling star field backdrop, which can result in the occasional frustrating death. But other than that, I don't have any complaints. If you want to play an excellent version of Galaga on your Commodore 64, track down this little gem*

at every opportunity to unleash a barrage of white hot death.

Not only are those pesky Guardians trying to kill you, they are serial kleptomaniacs as well. Every so often they try to steal your ship but in a nice twist, should you manage to be quick enough, you can shoot down the thieving little B... ees. This results in the stolen ship joining forces with your existing one giving double the firepower – sound familiar arcade fans?

Galancia is a proper old school shooter, influenced by *Galaga*, given a new lick of paint and it has a fresh feel. Bonus sections abound, providing the opportunity to add more points to the score while testing your accuracy and bravery to the max.

PRESENTATION 90%

GRAPHICS

SOUND

LOOKABILITY

PLAYABILITY

OVERALL 91%

SLIPSTREAM

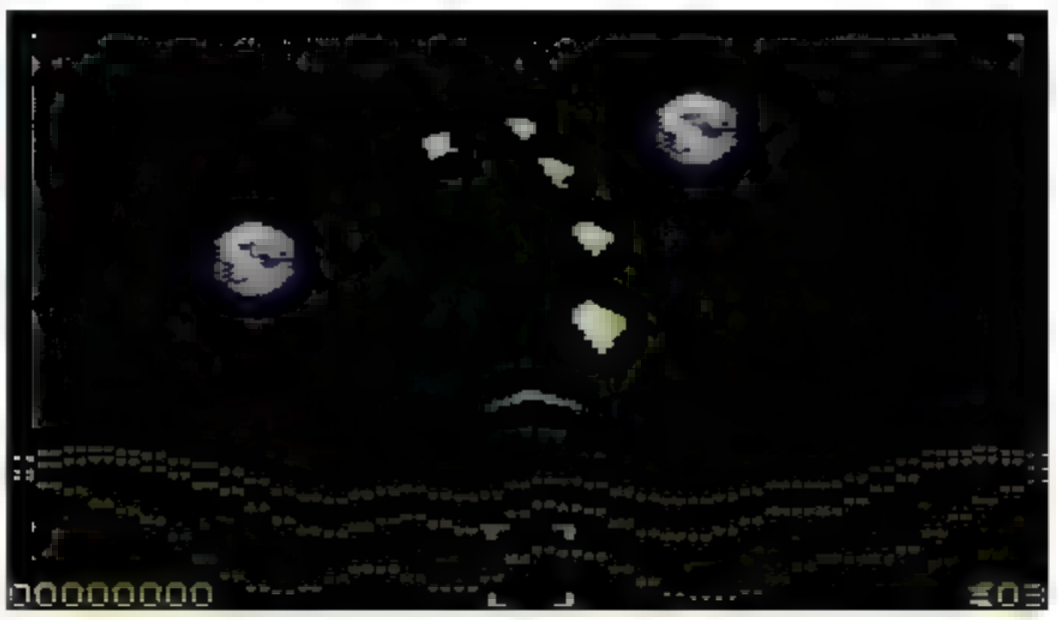
Psytronik/Boyknecht — 2017

Ah the future! How many times have we been promised wonders like rocket jetpacks and visiting granny in a flying car. As usual, though, the experts got it wrong; we never got the utopia promised by *Tomorrow's World*! Take the poor people of the Omikron system in the year 14634, for example, for two days every year the planet suffers devastation from passing asteroid showers – what should be done? The powers that be came to the rescue by building a robotic shielding station on the fourth planet in the system – Hmm . . . isolated robots, what could possibly go wrong?

For 23 years all went well . . . until a rogue energy burst caused the shield to blow a fuse, setting the robots free to roam the nearby star systems, destroying everything in their path

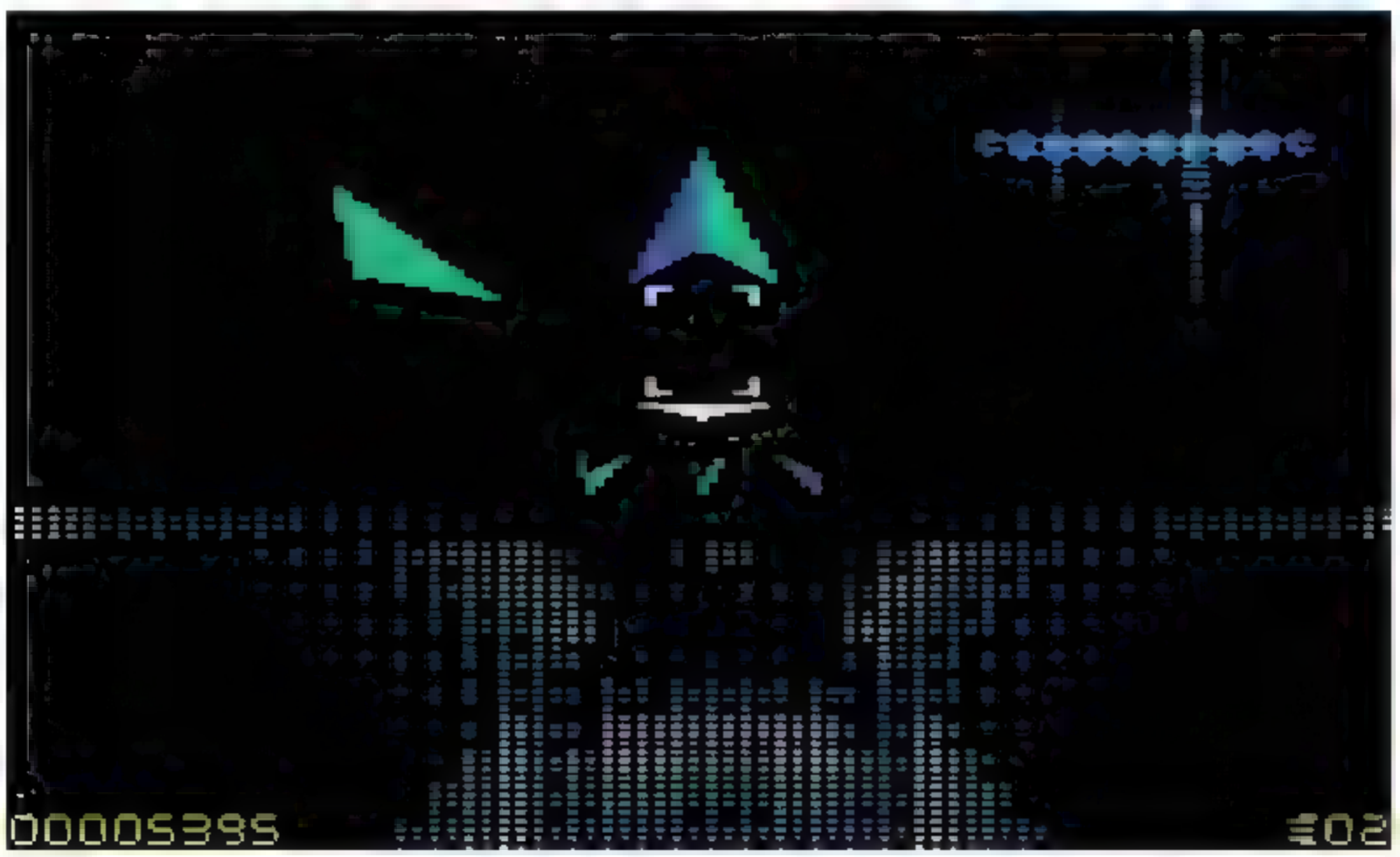
Enter the Slipstream starship, specifically designed to break the time barrier to track down and destroy the malfunctioning tin cans. There's a small issue, however. No man can fly the ship and so those clever Omikron boffins have come up with a remote console to allow a fearless drone pilot to operate a Slipstream interface and save the world, which is where ***you*** come in . . .

Stefan Mader and team have come up with a fast vector shooter that's actually playable on the C64. Even on a bog-standard machine the game is more than playable but if you are lucky enough to own a Turbo Chameleon 64 or SuperCPU then you are in for a visual feast. The sound has also been given plenty of love with a thumping tune accompanying the action. Sound effects are nicely done and there's a little digitised speech to liven things up even more



The C64 has never been too hot on vectors, though Mercenary *and, to some degree,* Space Rogue *prove otherwise. With that in mind I approached* Slipstream *with some trepidation. Presentation is excellent, with intermission screens and speech, and the game exudes the love that was obviously put into it. A pseudo* Rez*-style balance between movement and firing controls was the best compromise, and it becomes intuitive reasonably quickly. The graphics are also impressive, although occasionally it can be difficult to discern your ship from enemy vessels, let alone the bullets! For all the positives, the undeniable fact is the game itself is just a bit ambitious for a standard, unenhanced comput er. The frame rate is clunky and that does affect playability, but if you are willing to accept that a pretty decent challenge lurks behind.*

There's no denying the exciting concept behind Slipstream. *It's not like anything else on the C64, and I was really looking forward to playing it. The brilliant intro and superb in-game story piqued my interest still further. So it's a shame that the game doesn't live up to the expectation. Something of a cross between arcade classic* Gyruss *and the brilliant console game* Rez*, on paper* Slipstream *sounds like a winner and I think that if it were on a machine more capable of doing it justice, it would be (in fact the C16 version runs faster). Sadly, the 64's architecture does the programmers' vision no favours and the result is a beautifully presented and ambitious disappointment. There's a challenge here and it's worth a look, but ultimately it runs too slowly to be a successful shmup.*



BERZERK REDUX

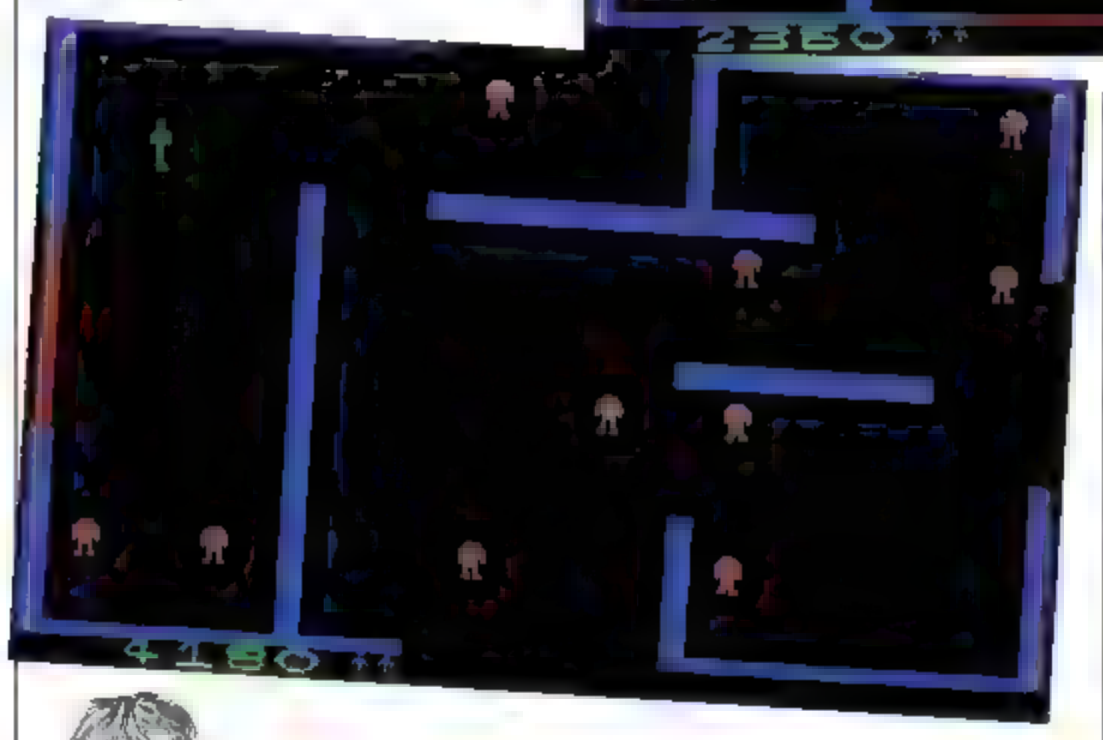
Martin Piper/RGCD/Psytronik — 2013

With the cries of 'Intruder Alert' still ringing in your ears take a moment to reflect on just how close Mad Otto came this time as you scrambled from the previous room. How many times has this played out since you landed on Mazeon? Too many, for sure.

It all started so quietly, the robots seemed unable to fight back, avoiding them was easy as they bumbled around, but dammit didn't you notice they always seemed to head towards you?

Only after they started firing at you and moving faster did you realise the true nature of the situation. Survival was now the only goal, keep going . . . room after room, avoid or kill the Automazeons and try and find a way out. Most important of all, don't let Evil Otto find you . . .

Berzerk Redux is a remake of the classic Stern arcade game with a difficulty curve that is spot on. As in the original things start slowly as you clear the early rooms of enemies, so much so that complacency can set in – a feeling that disappears quickly when Evil Otto's leering emoji grin suddenly appears when you spend a little too long in a room. Leave the room at the nearest exit, or die for sure.

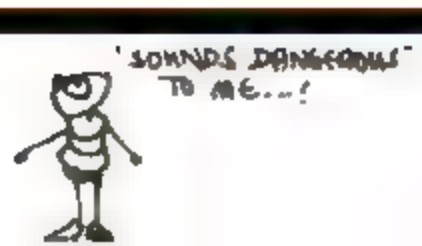


The tension ramps up even further once the robots start returning fire. Running into the electrified walls becomes a pretty common death as you wrestle the joystick to avoid the rapidly converging murderous AutoMazeons machines while being taunted by the faithful metallic voices of the arcade original coming out of the SID chip.

For a classic early arcade game, it's surprising there weren't any notable C64 versions. As conversions go this is good, although it isn't quite perfect. Most notably, the sound effects aren't as you remember, and Evil Otto moves a touch too fast. Minor differences aside, Berzerk Redux *plays a pretty tense game, which feels more strategic than the original. Robots seem to move like chess pieces in their attempts to box you in, leading to some frantic manoeuvring and blasting at times. It may lack variety and be as old as the hills, but if you're in the mood for a nostalgic blast,* Berzerk Redux *will hit the spot.*

Before Williams's 1982 Robotron 2084 *coin-op showed us exactly how single-screen robot annihilation should be done, there was Stern's 1980* Berzerk. *Slower and more strategic than the game it went on to inspire,* Berzerk *is a straightforward man versus machine shooter in which the player traverses a series of basic mazes using a slow-firing single-shot gun to lay waste to the robots that lurk therein. This all-new C64 conversion is a fairly faithful rendition of the crusty Golden Age of Arcades game. While Evil Otto, the smiling face that appears and chases you when you've almost completed a level, moves a little faster than I remember, the gameplay, slightly clunky controls, behaviour of the robots, and general screen layouts are all very reminiscent of the arcade original. I particularly like the sound. Although the spot effects aren't the same as the source machine, the game's sampled speech is. It proved quite the nostalgia trigger for me, and took me right back to playing the coin-op in the arcades of my youth.* Berzerk Redux*'s biggest issue is the repetitive nature of its gameplay. It's definitely challenging, but it just doesn't have much in the way of depth and variety. As a result, it's great for a quick trip down memory lane, but don't expect to be playing it for hours – unless you're an absolute diehard fan of the original*

A lot of love has gone into this, to the extent that they even include the arcade speech patterns. On the surface you get all the maze running, strategic robot shooting, Otto dodging action you could possibly hope for. However, it's not quite arcade faithful. The graphics are a little small for the maze layouts, the sound effects aren't identical, Evil Otto doesn't start off moving slowly on first appearing, and the robots never seem to run into the walls (but at least they collide with each other!). Still enjoyable, Berzerk Redux *is a fun, easy-to-play experience, but in all honesty if you want arcade accuracy,* Berzerk MMX *on the VIC-20 is probably the closest port you will find.*



ROCKET SMASH EX

RGCD & Psytronik — 2018

Back in 1983 Ultimate Play The Game released the Spectrum hit game *Jetpac* which never made it to the C64 – until now, that is, under the guise of *Rocket Smash EX*.

The story of the original game was quite simple – as the chief test pilot you delivered spaceship kits across the galaxy, assembled rockets, fuelled them by collecting six fuel canisters, and then flew onto the next destination.

Each planet had a get rich quick opportunity through filling a bottomless sack with precious gems and gold dropping from the galactic sky while bouncing across the platforms shooting the unfriendly alien inhabitants. The challenge was to survive long enough to fuel the ship and move on.

Rocket Smash EX follows pretty much the same formula, albeit with quite a lot of additional gloss over the *Jetpac* original. The game has a nice boppy sound track on the title screen; there are cut scenes between planets that have a smattering of a story line full of humour and the graphics are much more colourful and detailed. The aim, as it always was, is to get onto the top of the high score table.

Going back to the original and playing again there are a couple of differences that need to be noted that affect the enjoyment of the game – your spaceman in *Rocket Smash EX* doesn't move around the screen as quickly – which may well be a good thing, but it feels different enough to mention.

In another divergence, the *Jetpac* spaceman descended faster than objects falling from the top of the screen so he could swoop in to collect fuel canisters, but in *Rocket Smash EX* both spaceman and fuel drop at the same speed so you cannot collect anything until it rests on the planet floor.

'SEEMS LIKE A NICE GUY...'

I'm not gonna lie . . . although I've always been a die-hard Commodore 64 fan, there were a few games on other micros that caused me to suffer pangs of jealousy. Top of that list is Ultimate's legendary shmup Jetpac, *but now that we have* Rocket Smash EX, *I'll covet that Speccy classic no longer. This is so polished and well done that you wonder why we didn't get anything like it in the 64's prime. Patching together and refuelling your rocket is such a simple formula, but it's so addictive. I love the little story cut scenes, which add a little humour to a game in a genre that tends to lack it. If I could change anything, I'd like to be able to control my character's rate of descent, rather than have it limited by the game. Otherwise,* Rocket Smash EX *is a perfect high-score game and a superb version of an all-time classic.*

In my youth I may have occasionally lowered myself to play on the Speccy and Jetpac *was one of the AAA titles, with its ACG polish and solid but simple gameplay.* Rocket Smash EX *harks back to those fond memories and adds the C64 spritely look to this remake. It's a lovely homage to a classic game and has a sense of humour too, with the cut scenes, good-looking backdrops and nice quality marauding sprites. The main character is a chunky looking hero but bobs around the screen nicely scooping up fuel and bonuses. It flows well, maybe not having the inertia and fluidity of motion of the Speccy original, but it's a lovely rendition. Difficulty is about right too on Normal (with the option to change it) and the follow-on planets, complete with entertaining cut scenes, simple but jolly backing tracks and variety of ship and aliens makes for a fun nostalgia trip.*

ROCKET

SMASH

The C64 never received an official conversion of Jetpac, so this homage some 30 years later is oddly welcome and doesn't deviate much from the winning formula. Some nice multicolour graphics, a fun tune and slightly garbled speech draw you into the action immediately, and the intermissions are a humorous pause in proceedings. There is a gentle difficulty curve and the action doesn't really start kicking off until planet three or four, so anyone unfamiliar with the gameplay has a chance to survive The oxygen meter is a nice touch as it prevents the player from sitting on a level and infinitely scoring points, which for a score-based game was always a significant flaw in the original, and the action moves along nicely. In the end, Rocket Smash EX *isn't the most complex of games, but is nice for a pick up and play bash to relive old times*

PRESENTATION 84%

GRAPHICS 86%

Small but p
with ball

SOUND 87%

S
along with

HOOKABILITY 83%

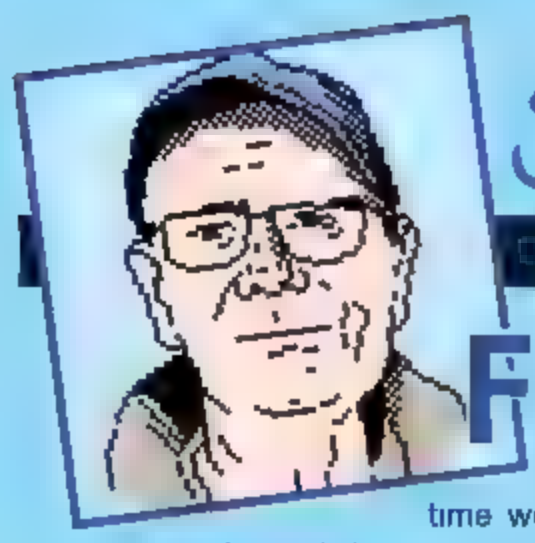
impossible to resis

LASTABILITY 81%

OVERALL
85%

A brilliant rendition of a classic
can outdoing

Simon Butler's ART GALLERY



'OOH — ISN'T HE ARTY!'

For reasons best known to Lord ZZAP!, I have been dragged out of my tar pit again and asked to wax lyrical on all things pixelated. This time we're in the world of the two-wide, one-high pixel that once split playgrounds asunder as boyish affiliations bounced between a limited palette with attribute clash and having a wide choice of browns. While some of us found the strange shaped pixel to be something of a challenge, there were those who took to it like ducks to water. Without naming those responsible, we all know our heroes from the golden era of game development, those who wrestled with the C64 and came out victorious every time. One or two were colleagues who made my efforts seem risible at best, but you will find none of them here today

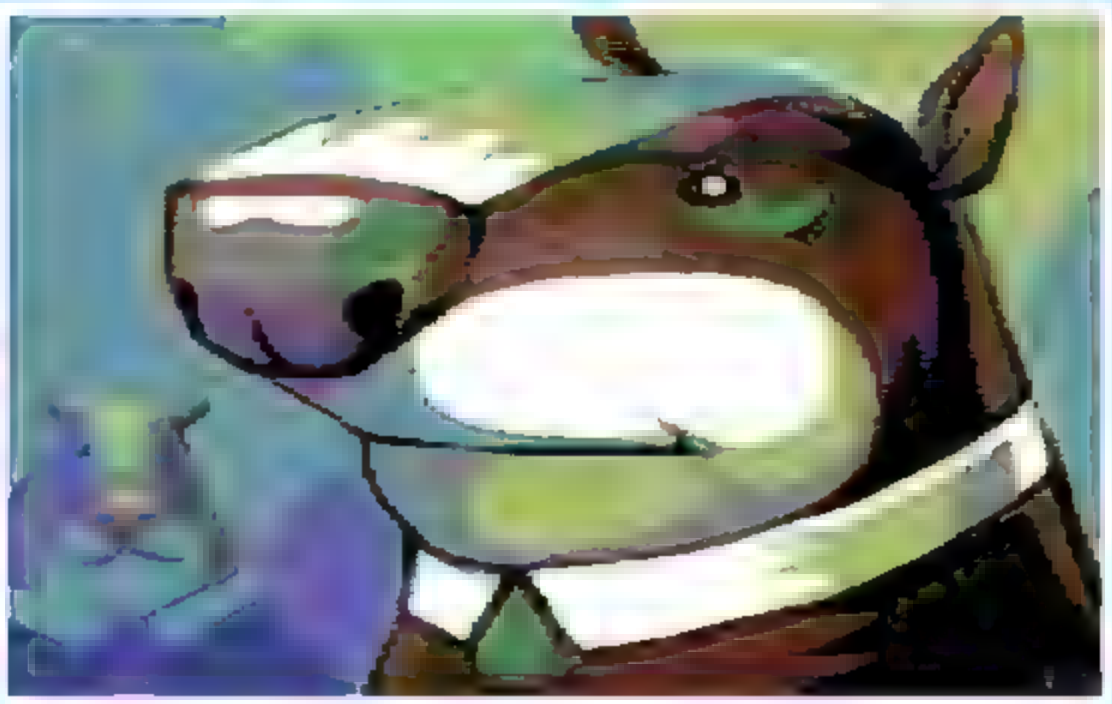
When asked by the Dark Lord Wilkins if I would cast my eye across the artwork of C64 aficionados from the years after my exit from the 8-bit scene, I already had some ideas of who I would include. How wrong was I?

A quick search revealed a wealth of talent from the demoscene, all masters without exception. My earlier mental notes disappeared post haste as a list of true adepts grew like wildfire. With the exception of one person who was a stone cold cert from the outset, I struggled desperately to whittle down a list that was almost as long as Tom Baker's scarf, to include what I consider some of the finest examples of C64 graphics. My detective skills are not the best so some of the choices here remain hidden behind their online alter egos.

That said let us walk into a magical world of 16 colours and unbridled imagination

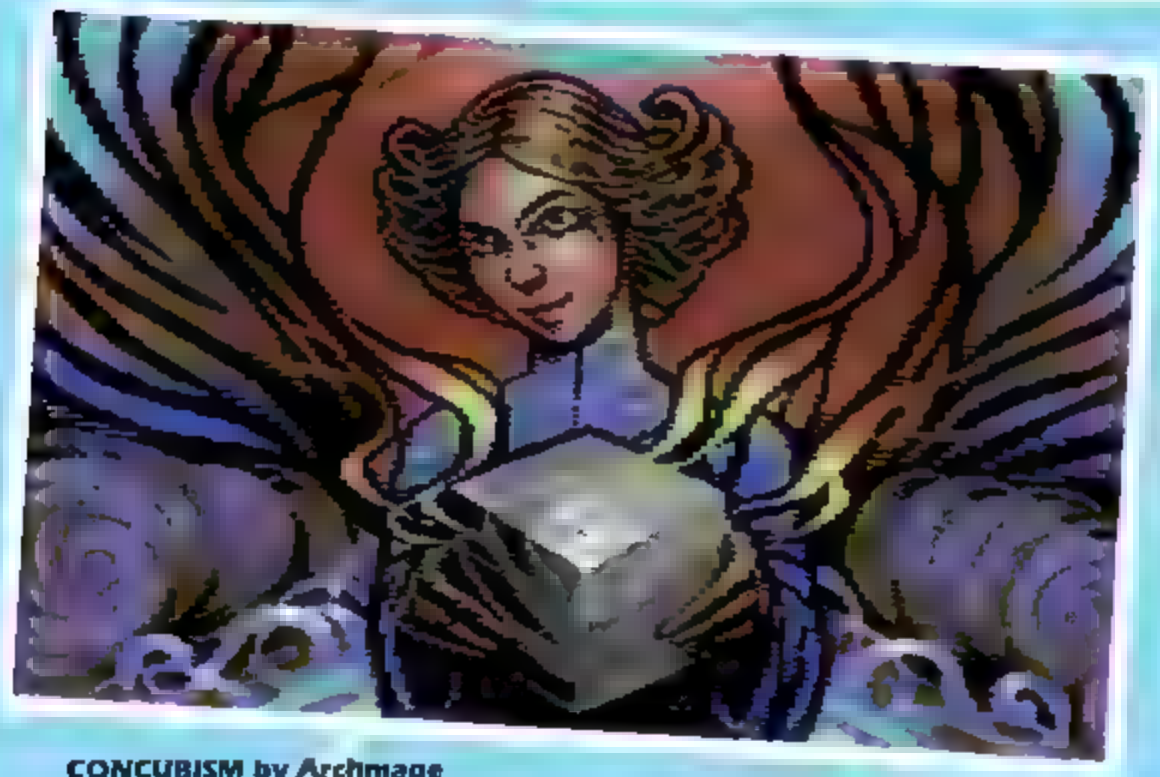
SIR MARMOT WOMBADGER
(ILKke, 2012)

This fine fellow just cried out for inclusion. Great character design is an art in itself and this image has not only clean crisp lines and an excellent use of colour, but it's a bold image of a chap, who in my humble opinion should have a game of his own. With a nose to challenge mine, he walks through town under the adoring eyes of his peers. The devil is in the detail and the detail here is in the great swathes of black shading combined with the stylised blocks of colour that give a bright sheen to his snout. A fine start to this year's collection that emerged victorious after battling with other equally stunning works from the mysterious ILKke.



BB – BOBBLE by Carrion
(Tomek Mielnik, 2010)

I was adamant there would be no game-related images but I discovered this little gem by a very talented young man from Poland and my resistance crumbled. How could I resist with Bub and Bob rendered so magnificently? Bob's gormless expression as the gelatinous bubble emerges is perfect and the trails of slime in his cavernous mouth are quite revoltingly amazing in their simplicity. Bub looks on in admiration in a strange and semi-psychedelic environment. Is it a cavern? Are the ominous greenish trails in the distance vapours from the bubbling noxious pit below? Who knows and frankly, who cares when you have such an amazing image of two of gaming's greatest characters? Bub and Bob, long may you blow!



CONCUBISM by Archmage
(Hakon, 2008)

From Norway, we have a mystical piece that at least for me has a hint of Princess Leia to it mixed with an ominous grey cube that is somehow affecting the world around it. I think the bold black lines appealed to the old cartoonist in me but what first seemed like a simple image has many subtleties with almost pastel shades in the rolling mists to the left and right and smooth sensuous lines behind the darker shapes. It's a sombre and seemingly innocent image that when examined contains a dark potential in the elements. It could easily be a panel from a comic book and I for one would love to know the meaning of the cold grey cube and the outcome of its appearance in the hands of such an innocent and defenceless girl. Top marks for execution with added bonus points for mystery and intrigue.

STRIKE FORCE by PROWLER
(Klas Benjaminsson, 2014)

Where do I even start on this particular gem? There are so many elements here it beggars belief. Cubist shapes with bold blues and subtle shades of green, grey and more to the right. An eye-wrenching transition to another cascade of simple but arresting shapes to the left exists under the wing of a magnificent and terrifying eagle that is shifting from one reality to another to attack its prey. The snake sits placid, balancing the composition perfectly with more detail in its scales than I would ever care to consider. So many different visual tricks which could have jarred the eye or overwhelmed the piece entirely, yet here it works. It has the feel of a rock album cover from the late 70s or early 80s. So much so, that I will now go and listen to some suitable progressive rock.

SEROTONIN by JAILBIRD (Arnaid Chistai, 2016)

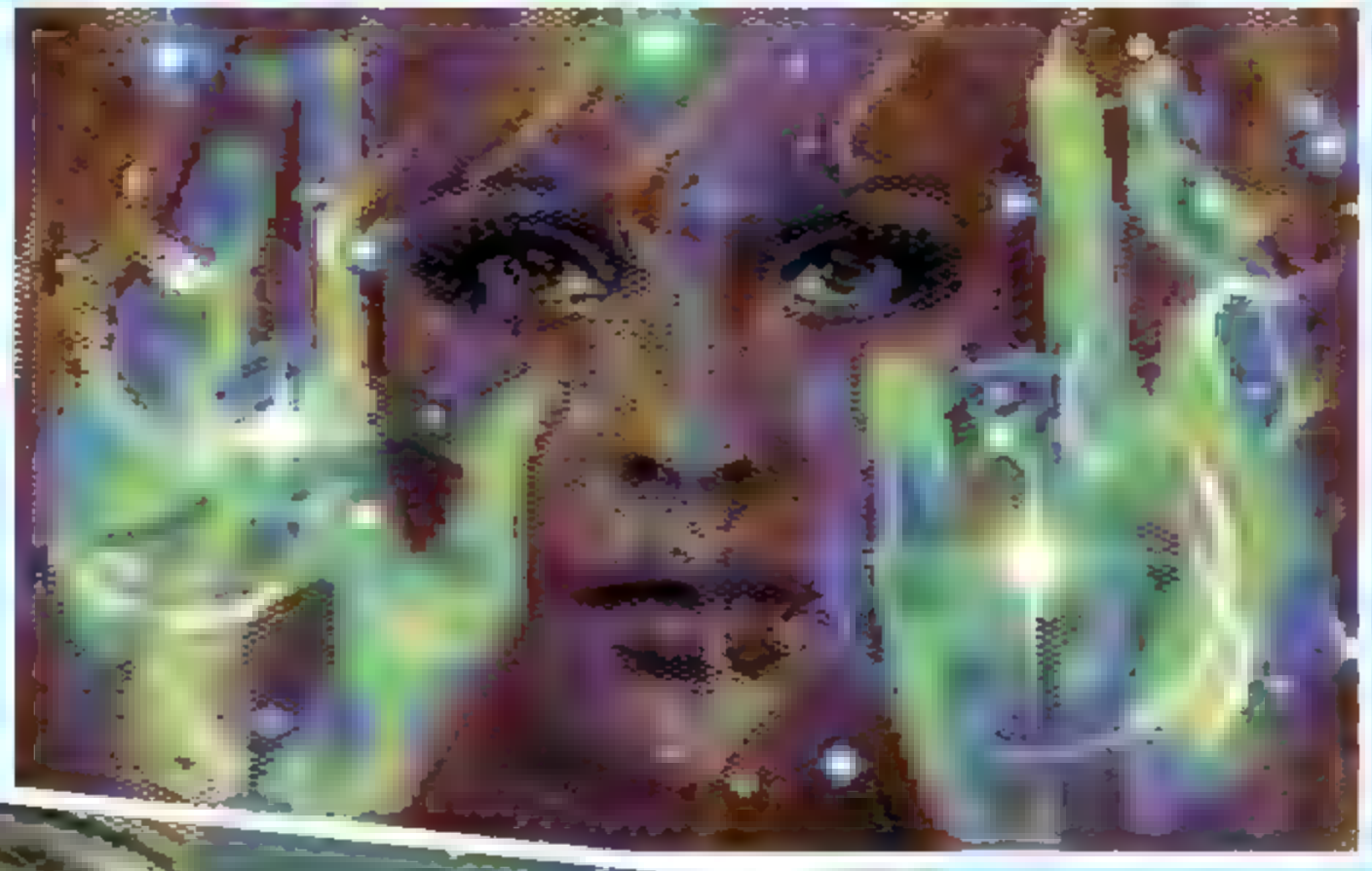
I had planned to include a totally different piece from Jailb rd, but this powerful, claustrophobic image just haunted me until I finally submitted to its demands. The lines pul the eye in different directions suggesting unp umbed depths but also with hints of enclosure and imitation. There is text hidden among the angles with strange, fractured faces and a possible doorway in the left eye of the man on the far right who I feel strongly resembles the writer William Burroughs. Cubist, abstract or psychede ic? It's all of those and more and is as exciting to look at, as it is unnerving. Amazingly deceptive in its seeming simp icity

THE EYE OF SHLARM by PTOING (Sven Ruthner 2017)

I have been a fan of this ta.ented young German artist for qu te a few years. He's got a wealth of amazing graphics out there if you hunt him down and it was exceptionally difficult to choose one piece for this article. This, one of his more recent creations, just put a big, daft grin on my old, daft face for many reasons. It's amazingly well designed; the colours are subtle and the detai top notch. Ltle graphical gems are scattered throughout the picture. In the hands of someone less skilful, they could have cluttered or detracted from the piece but here it's a visua feast. Is the horned beastie Shlarm and has he removed his own eye causing that rather unfortunate squint? He has already lost his right hand requiring a poorly attached green replacement. Is the eyebal a token or souven r from his travels? Is he a trader in exotic ephemera? He certainly astounded his audience with his macabre presentation. I for one hope that Sven revisits this fantasyland to bring back more tales of its strange inhabitants.

FIRE by JOE (James Svard, 2011)

The first of two from an exceptionally talented, a.l-round artist is a wonderfully rendered p ece of fantasy psychedelia. The shapes and swirls that pull the eye away from the beautiful girl in the background almost seem to move as you look from one part of this p cture to another The colours and the trans ucent feel of her hands he ghten the mystical theme as she weaves her magic spel upon the unsuspecting viewer. The 60s is alive and wel n as fine a 'trippy mage as you could wish for from a master of his chosen art.

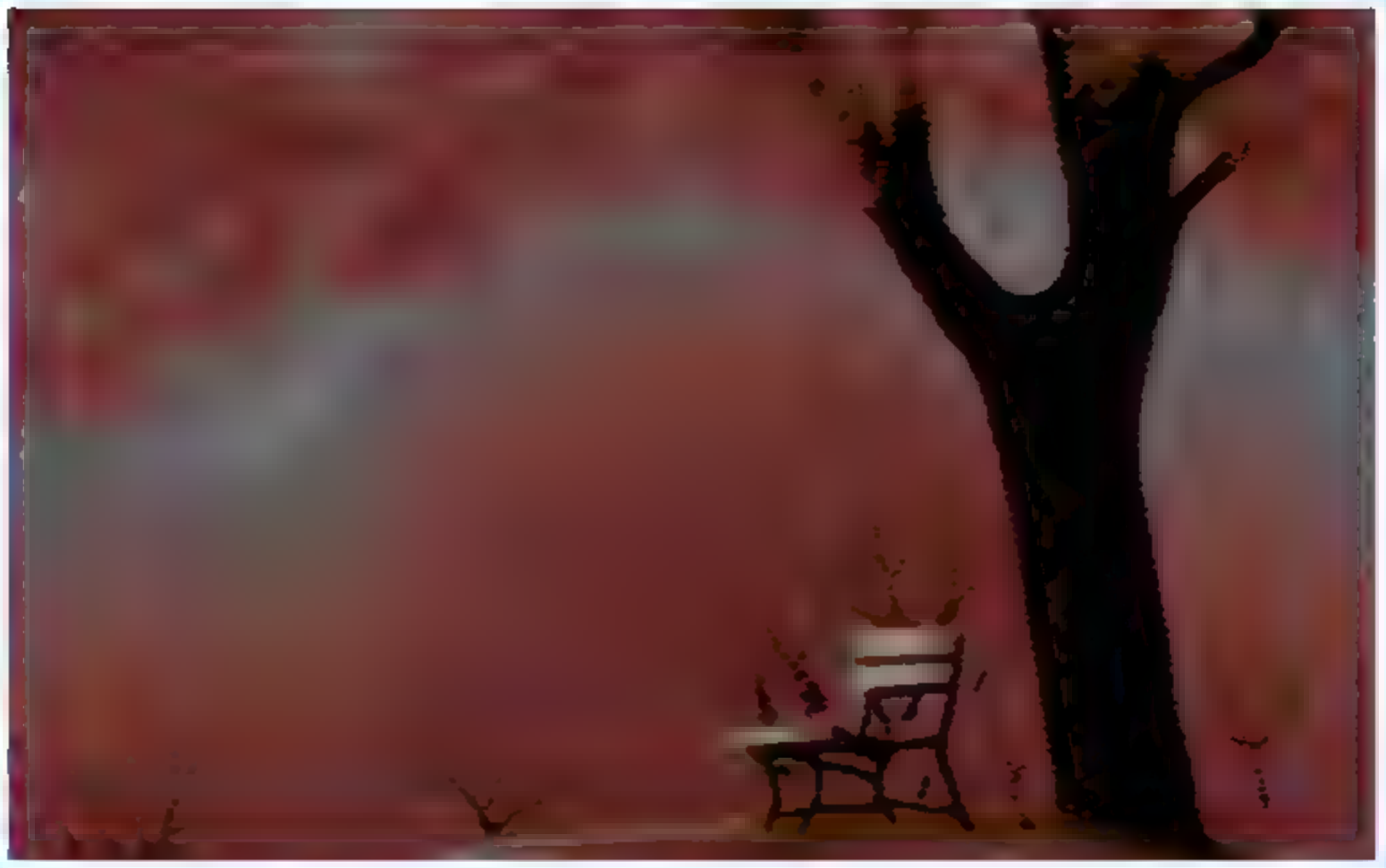


REFLECTION by JOE (James Svard, 2012)

All warmth and mysticism is long gone and replaced with a cold, contemplative piece from some dystopian future with flesh and blood replaced with unfeeling synthetics and stee. The girl in the picture seems to be search ng for her lost humanity. Her wistful expression resolute and accepting her fate as irreversible. The pastel shades and abstract shapes that fill the world around are incongruous with the hard edges of her manufactured body. yet this only heightens the 'otherness' of the mage These last two images are only a small part of a large portfol o of exceptiona. work from an artist still plying his trade to great effect.

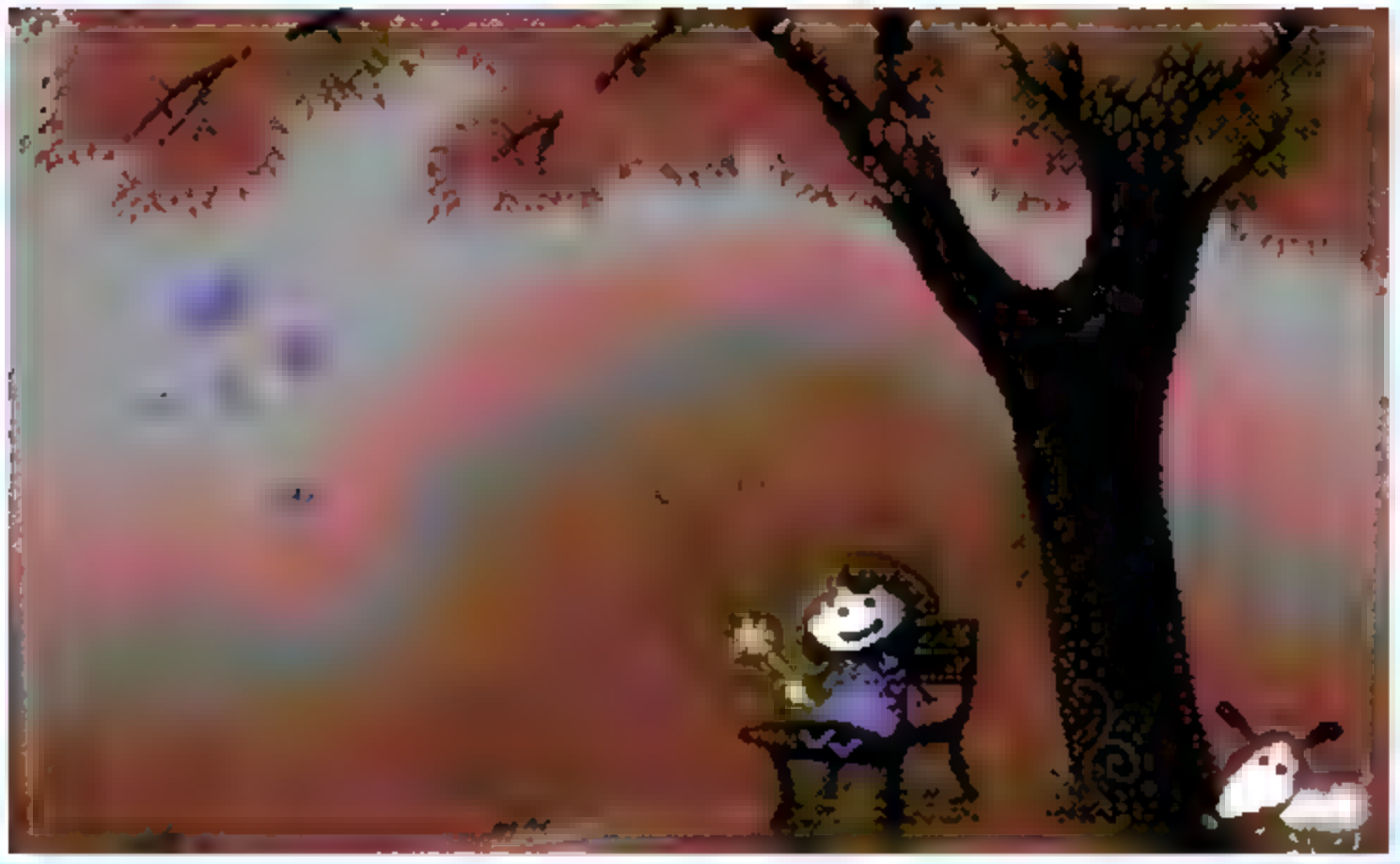
Simon Butler's ART GALLERY

Here is a trio of images which illustrate how the demoscene feeds off and into each others' creativity.



SONG OF FALL (Leon, 2006)

Here we have a wonderfully understated mood piece with very little detail until the eye is drawn up into the foliage which is so stylised it seems like wisps of smoke. The stark, bare trees below and the empty bench emphasise the loneliness that fills this delightful picture. One year later and the same scene took on a distinctly different aspect in the hands of the talented Vanja Utne.

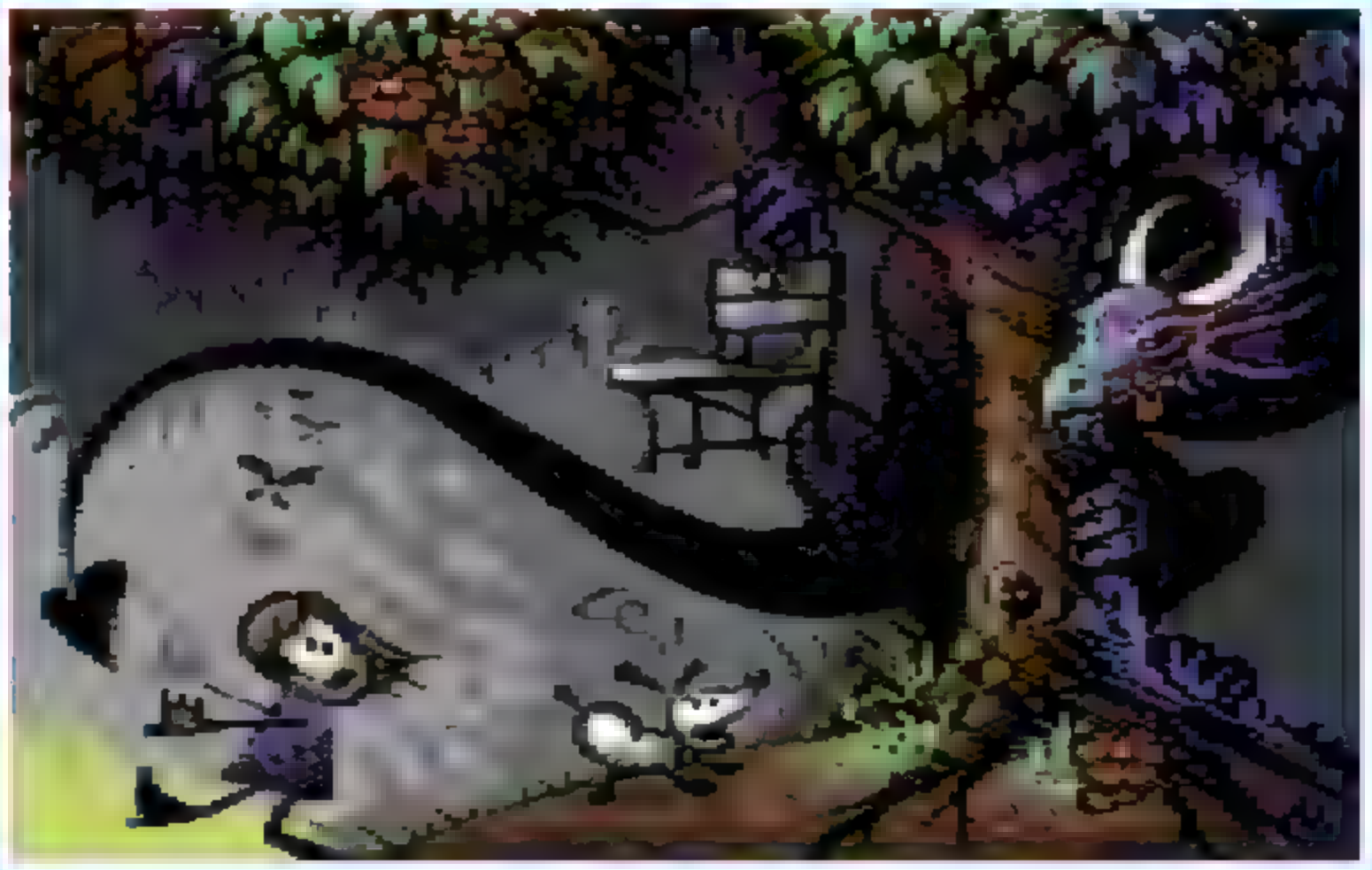


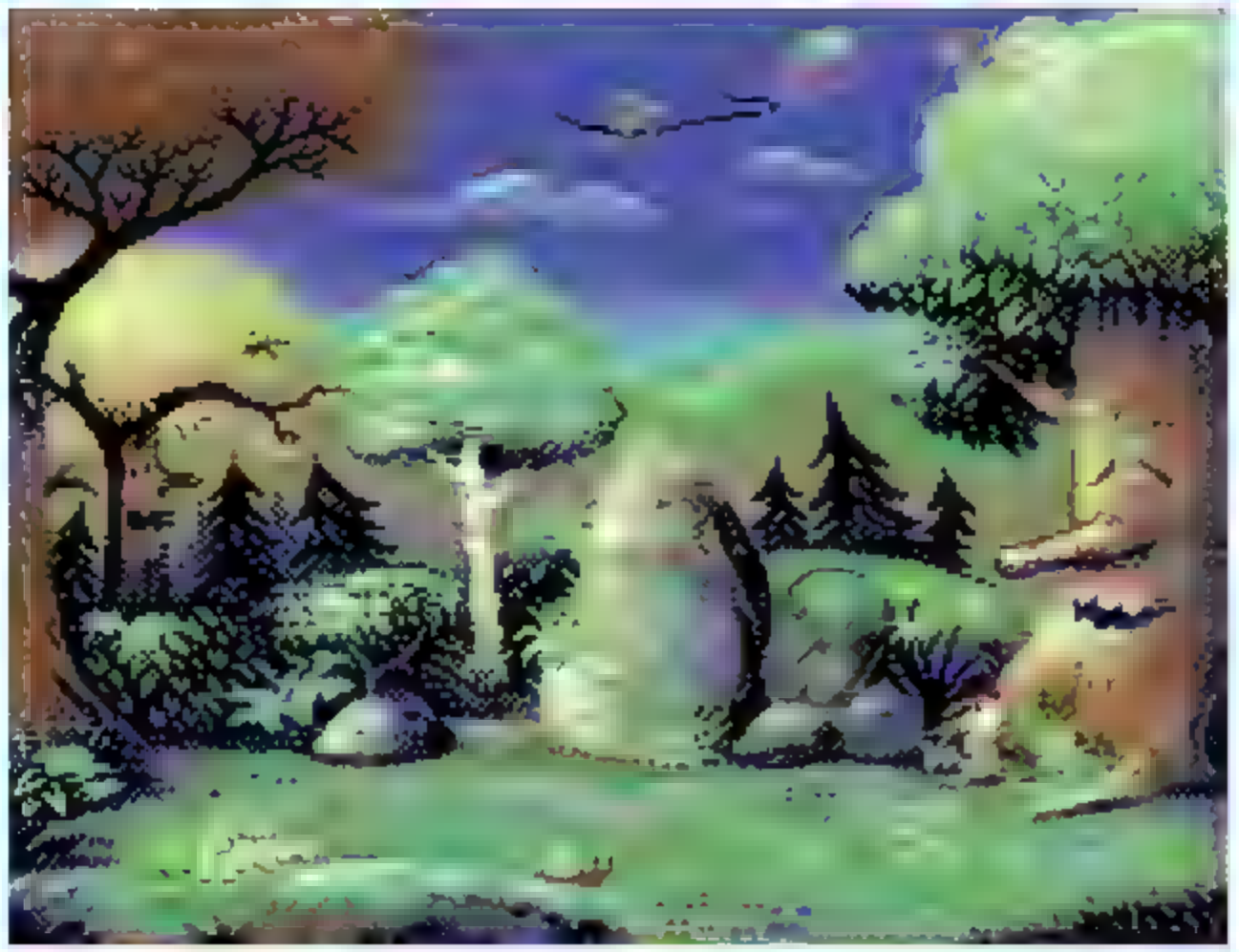
UNDER THE RED TREE
by MERMAID
(Vanja Utne, 2007)

This lovely hi-res picture shows a scene that is not totally dissimilar to the previous image. Gone are the skeletal trees and the frothy foliage is now replaced with leaves in full bloom. A flurry of butterflies dances above rich twisting flowers that surround a tiny visitor and her bemused looking dog. Surely, nothing could disturb this happy scene.

OH NOES, THEY BE STEALING MY BENEFIT - MIRAGE (LARS VERHOEFF, 2007)

In a whirling grey storm cloud the peace and serenity of the first two images shatters with the arrival of a hungry dragon. Red tongue hanging from his toothy grin he has reached down with one great purple claw to possibly catch the small child for a late afternoon snack. Coming up empty handed, he is left with nothing but the empty bench. Below the brave hound stands valiant and defiant. With typical flair, Mirage plays expertly with colour and shape; throwing details such as the flowers in the tree above, the roots that anchor the now mature tree and a small creature nestled in a knothole. Even the beleaguered butterflies are battling with the dragon's tempestuous arrival.





DRAGONSLAYER by MERMAID
(Vanja Utne, 2015)

See a witless knight bite off more than he can chew when he faces this majestic dragon in our final piece from Mermaid. Subtlety has never been my watchword, yet that is what makes this piece a work of true class. The pale, reptilian sheen on the dragon's flesh is perfection itself while the razor sharp spines fade in a delicate shade of lilac towards the tail. Bumps, carbuncles and all manner of warty extrusions are depicted with the fewest possible pixels. The cavernous mouth, filled with a host of horrible fangs is far from terrifying. The beast seems more inclined to conversation than consumption if the smouldering soldier would only pause for a second. The icing on the perfect pixel cake for me is the tiny currant eyes on both characters. They are simplicity and genius combined. Lovely stuff.

TEST FLIGHT
by MERMAID
(Vanja Utne, 2016)

The bright, pastel colours and general feeling of a happy woodland world filled with sunshine and magic, not to mention foolhardy mice who should know better than to go ballooning alone. With luck, his compatriot in the upmost branches of the wise old tree will rescue our tiny aviator and bring him back to solid ground. The whole image has a storybook feel that makes you wish you knew more about the world illustrated so masterfully in this excellent image.

I am honoured to have walked through these pixelated halls and humbled by the level of excellence and true creative genius that I discovered.

SANXION REPLUGGED by MIRAGE
(Lars Verhoeff, 2009)

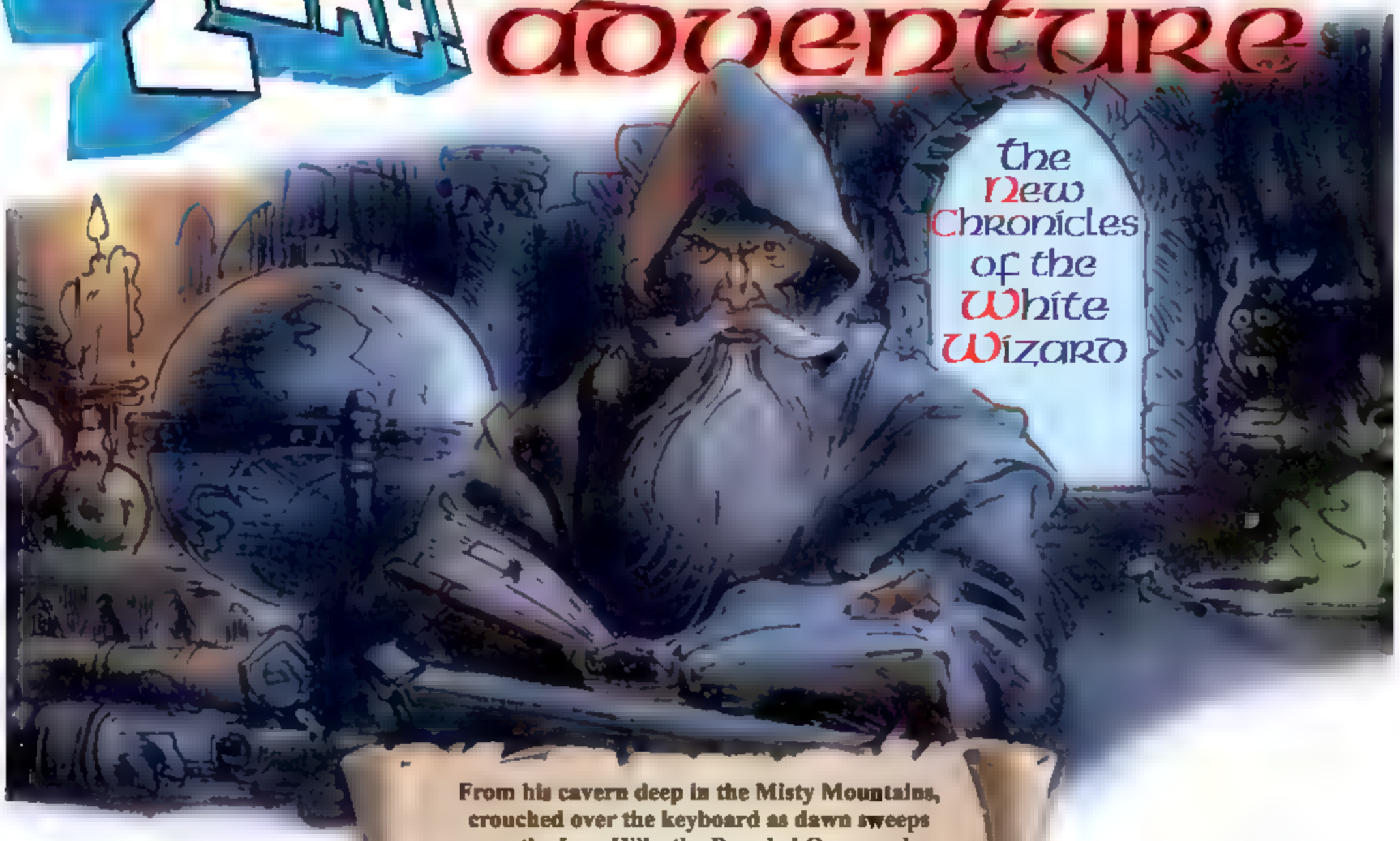
It is very rare to find a loading screen or standalone graphic that is more than a mere approximation of the cover art, yet here is as fine an example to the opposite as you could wish to see. The metallic sheen on the logo is perfection, the logo itself is identical to the original. The action virtually bursts out of the image in a piece that simply cried out to be included when I was resolute about my decision to avoid game-related imagery. The humble pixel is handled with gusto in this beautiful rendition of one of my all time favourite pieces of cover-art

MS PACMAN by MIRAGE
(Lars Verhoeff, 2007)

This particular image was the first I found when asked to take on this commission and to be completely honest; no superlative is too high for something that rocked me in my seat when first clapped eyes on it. The composition is jarring; Ms Pacman in all her pixelated glory set incongruously behind an amazing rendering of someone who looks as if he has just walked out of a Norman Rockwell painting. Aging and obviously from another era, he looks sufficiently bewildered by the arcade shenanigans behind him. The painterly use of pixels is astonishing and even after looking at this image for weeks prior to sitting down and writing about it, I still find it truly incredible

For those C64 owners who would rather use their words than wiggle their joysticks

adventure



From his cavern deep in the Misty Mountains, crouched over the keyboard as dawn sweeps over the Iron Hills, the Bearded One, newly-reincarnated as Stuart Williams after decades of wandering shade-like in the dark beyond, taps out this epistle to adventurers across the world.

Hail, my fellow adventurers, daring explorers and apprentice Wand Wielders – well met at the appointed place! Here begin The New Chronicles of The White Wizard for a brand new ZZAP!64 Annual Welcome, one and all come join our quest!

Here shall we once more GET and LIGHT the dusty lamps of old, chant the Words of Power and polish the Wands of Wisdom, even discovering, should time permit, why a Wizard's Staff has a knob on the end! For those of more warlike bent, you also may yet have opportunity to draw your swords 'gainst annoying Orcs and irritating elves, take spiky cudgels to the grisly, gruesome ogres of adventure land, and poke fun (with a spear, naturally) at the bombastic, beardy boggits of Boggiton.

Verily, Wizard Tips, News and Reviews shall be laid out upon the spreading parchment before ye, and yea, even a magical new interview with the mighty Master Wizard himself, the legendary **Scott Adams**.

Say Yoho! So mote it be – let me tell you of the days of high adventure!

But first, my young apprentices, as I take up the mantle of the Snowy Sorcerer Supreme for the first time and begin a new era of magical mumblings, moanings, mutterings and meanderings, whilst removing the dusky cloth from my scrying-glass and polishing my wand thoughtfully, I am yet minded to recall the puissant magical reputation of the first incarnation of Ol' Whitey, and to pay tribute to his former alter ego, the almost as legendary 'White Wizard Contacter' **Steve Cooke**, who began his quest for arcane powers in ancient times of yore, when but a scribe (indeed, Deputy Editor) atop the teetering towers of the Lost Citadel of *Personal Computer Games*.

Truly, my friends, those with long memories, a particularly detailed (and dubiously bound) Grimoir written in the blood of a blind salamander at the dark of the Moon, or a humongous pile of crumbling and spider-haunted back copies, will indeed recall that first White Wizard's scrolls of wonder at *PCG*. But his best work was yet to come – when he made the leap to *ZZAP!* Towers!

As the tale is sung by the bards, it was largely due to the fickle finger of fate that the first Curmudgeonly Conjurer's path led to a new destiny at ZZAP!64. For, according to the Chronicles of Crash issue XIV, the biggest crash of 1985 was that of *PCG*. It is told in the dusty scrolls that they had failed to win sufficient gold from the dragons of business for ads, without which a modern magazine (or indeed, an ancient one) cannot survive. This was as true then as it is now.

It came to pass, then, that ZZAP!64 was launched that April, and the editor of this mighty mag-to-be was Chris Anderson, he who was lord and master of *PCG* until the Ravens of Prophecy gave him news of *ZZAP!* He brought with him Bob Wade and other scribes, including the White Wizard, and so with the first ZZAP!'d issue, of May 1985, a legend was reborn, and Old Whitey was granted a large adventure section under his mystic thrall.

Issue 1 of ZZAP!64 proudly announced in letters of fire *White Wizard lives on. The greatest adventure writer of them all casts his spell on ZZAP! with reviews, news, help and his personal top ten'* No pressure, then, Wand Wielders. Steve Cooke was credited, crypt-ically, as 'White wizard contacter'. But we know the truth, do we not, my young apprentices? And so, history was made, and a wizardly career rose phoenix-like at *ZZAP!64*.

In those dim and distant days, the ZZAP! Editorial team was first located in Yeovil, but as early as issue 4, the whole moveable feast relocated to Newsfield in Ludlow, to cut costs and be under the same roof as Crash, when Roger Kean took over as editor, with scribes Gary Penn and Julian Rignall supporting.

The coming years were exciting and challenging ones for Old Whitey and his alter ego. Several pages each month were devoted to the sometimes curmudgeonly but always forthright and fascinating cacklings which issued forth from beneath the wizard's mystical hood and majestic face-fungus. Adventure game reviews, news, the White Wizard's very own ten all-time favourites, hints, letters and even maps. Readers were well-served indeed.

Whether it be spells, incantations or game reviews, the wizard's standards were high, and if your adventure was less than enchanting the very least you could expect was a rap over the knuckles with his Z-tipped wand. If unlucky, you might need a Necromancer!

He was never afraid to call a boggit a boggit, a balrog a balrog, or indeed a spade a spade, and so occasionally stirred up controversy. One time, so the scrolls tell, Ol' Whitey referred, in his Wizard's Mailbag, to a disagreement with one of his reviews from publisher Mike Woodroffe of Adventure Soft, who sent a missive

saying they were very upset about it and that US Gold were considering not sending any more Adventure Soft games in for review – can you believe it? As you might expect, the Master Mage gave as good as he got, and better, on such occasions.

These were indeed magical years for adventurers of the clan 64, a very special breed indeed – as you are still today, O Wand Wielders and Sword Slingers!

Sadly, though, all legends come to an end, and the ZZAP! years of the first White Wizard were to conclude, not so much with a bang but a fizz and a phut and a shower of sulphurous sparks amid blizzard and storm in the darkling months of 1987. Old Whitey's departure was as mysterious, to many, as his arrival, and was announced in suitably sombre tones by ZZAP! 64's editor of the day, Ciarán Brennen, in the October issue. He wished the wizard well, but revealed that, after a career with ZZAP! which stretched back almost to the beginning, the bearded one was '. . . off to cast spells and hexes in pastures new. . . ' but advised understandably bereft readers to ' watch out for his successor next month'.

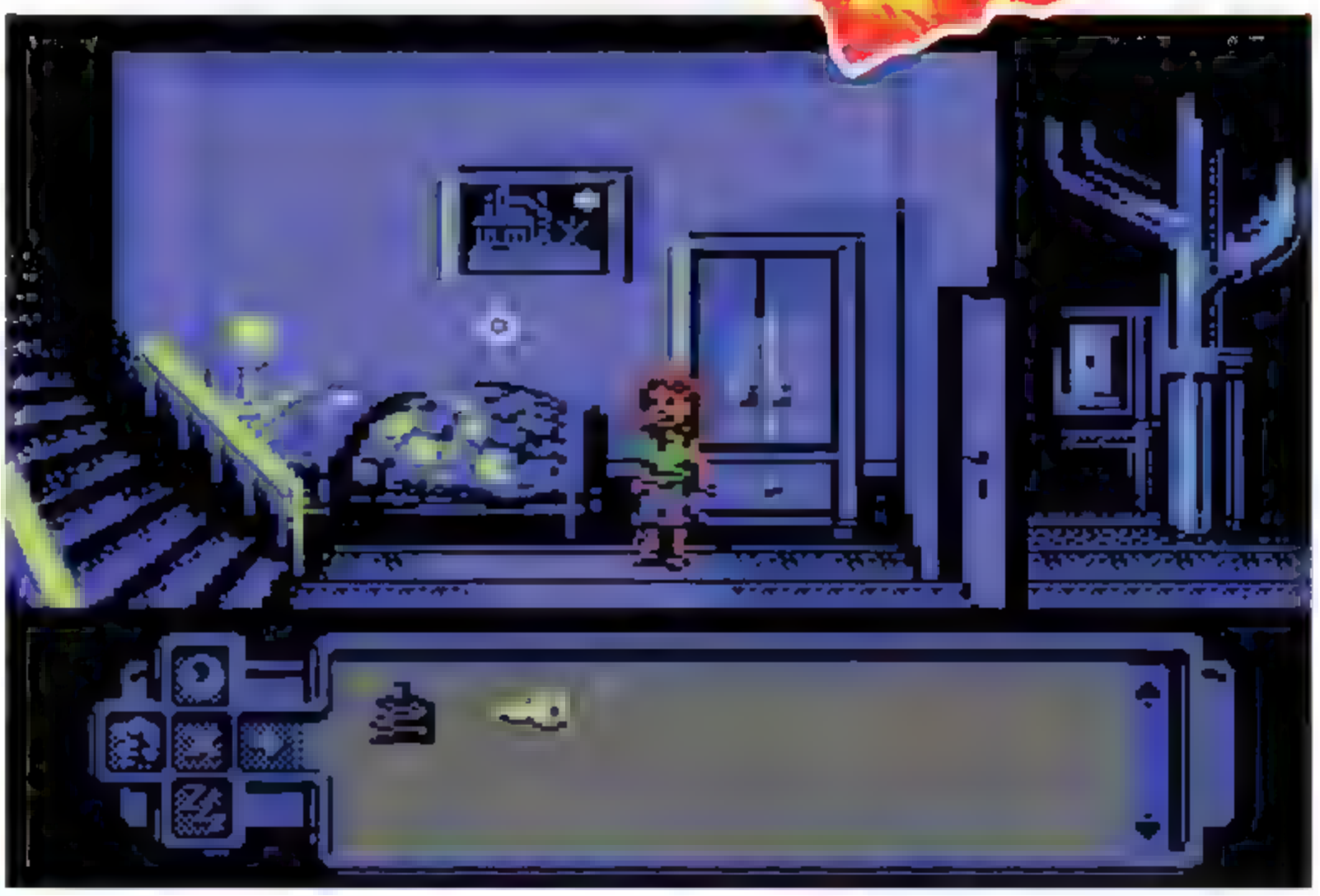
And so, The White Wizard was seen no more, at least in that incarnation. Who was his replacement to be? A masked and beardless youth in chequered tights, who would be known as The Harlequin. But that, my young apprentices, is another story.

ADVENTURE REVIEWS

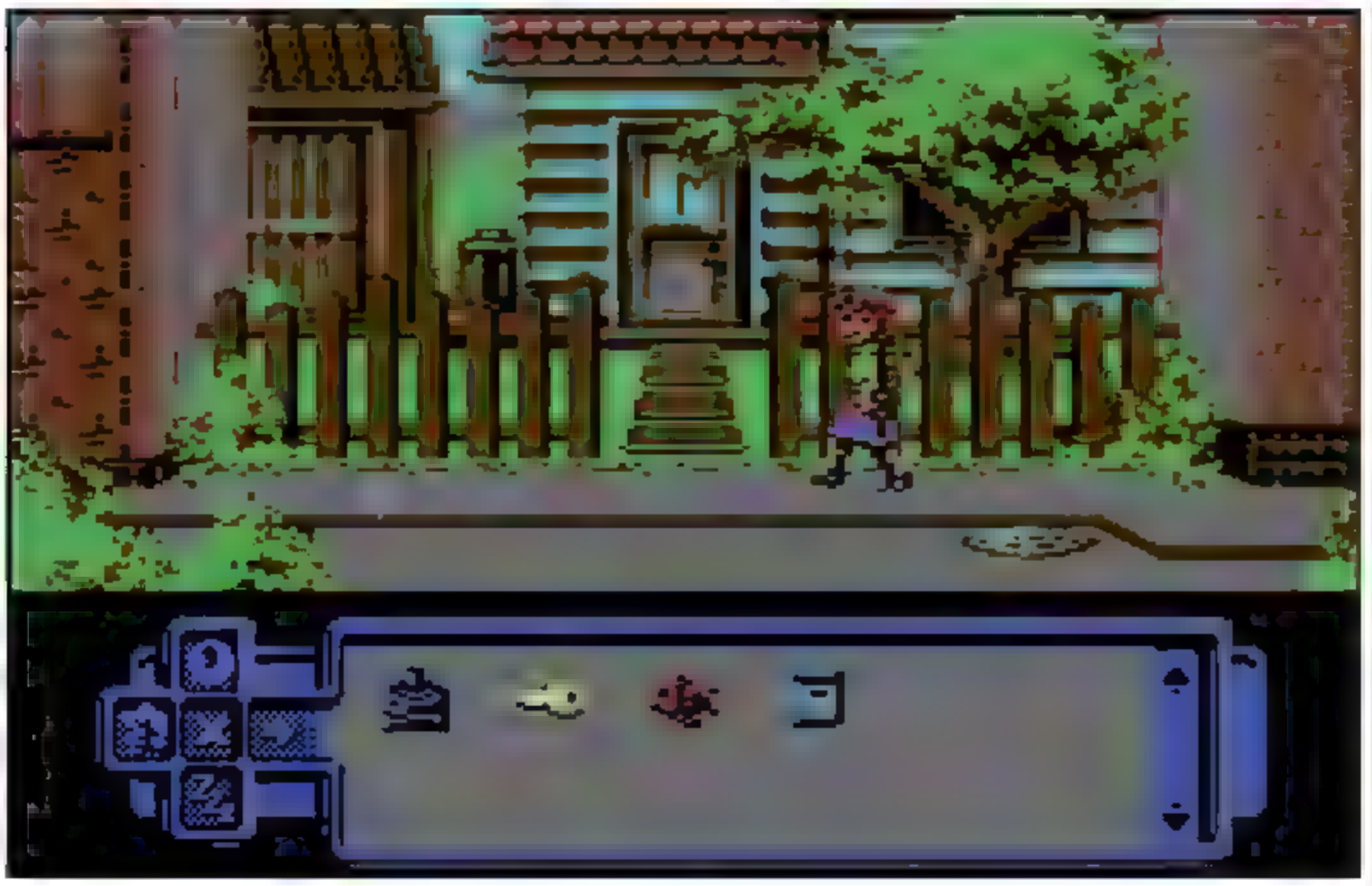
Caren and the Tangled Tentacles

PriorArt, Free download

Released on 31 August, 2015, after winning first place in the Forum 64 Adventure Compo, *Caren and the Tangled Tentacles* is an old-school point-and-click adventure in the style of *Maniac Mansion* and *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*. The game was created by dev team Prior Art, who are known in-scene as Enthusi, Veto and Jammer. Programming and scripting have been done by Dr. Martin Wendt, with graphics and animation by Oliver Lindau and music and sound effects from Kamil Wolnikowski.



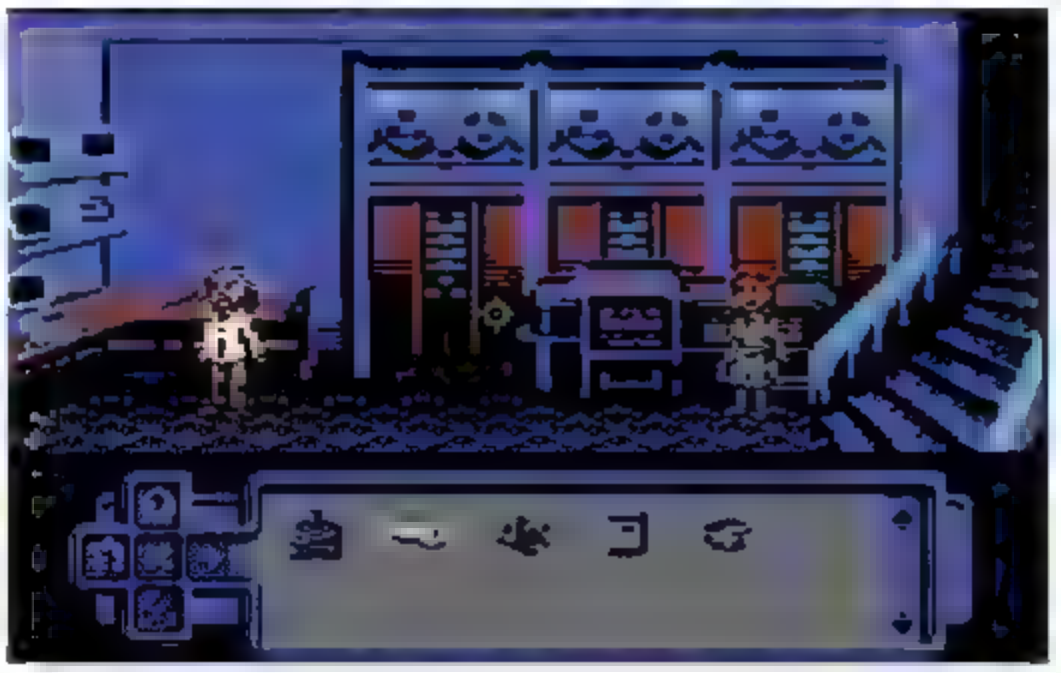
In the game, you take on the persona of Caren, a young woman in her early twenties who works as a chemist in a local institute. One day, she makes a strange discovery there, and so begins to investigate what is behind some sinister events. Your mission, as Caren, is to piece together as much as possible of the mystery and finally uncover an eldritch secret that lurks in the deep. On her way, Caren needs to deal with a mysterious shop owner, the institute receptionist, IT expert Doc Amber, and a small rat who apparently loves Caren, but this is (sadly) unrequited. In addition, there is also Bothell, Caren's boss's dog, and another, unknown person who is shrouded in a mystical secret and who can apparently be in more than one place at the same time . . .



Ingeniously, the game is designed to be switchable between German and English at any time, it also runs on PAL and NTSC systems, although the fastloader is a PAL-only option. It also incorporates a built-in seven-page manual, which is accessible once the game is loaded.

The on-screen game display is split, with the top showing your surroundings in very attractive and well-drawn graphics considering

the resolution, some occasionally animated, including facial movement when the game characters are speaking (in speech balloons), and with various expressions for Caren according to her situation. She can also move behind certain objects, which is very cleverly done. To set the scene in different locations, graphics may also be complemented with nicely done sound effects and/or music, which adds a lot to the atmosphere



The bottom section of the screen is for the control menu and inventory. Game action is joystick-controlled (port 2), using a pointer to select 'hot spots' in the upper graphics display to allow interaction, or to send Caren off on a walk to other on-screen locations. The well-designed custom control system created for the game allows both clicking of target position and graphical command selection using just one fire button. A short press sends Caren to the selected location, a long press changes to action mode, so you can select menu options; with 'use with' selected, the cursor enters the inventory to choose an object for interaction. There are also a few optional keyboard commands.

Conclusion

What can I say? If you're fan of the LucasArts style of point-and-click adventures then you'll definitely enjoy this. Even LucasArts legend Ron Gilbert apparently likes it, so who am I to argue? This is a great little game, really stylish, atmospheric, with great graphics. It's not too long and is easy to play, with relatively simple puzzles but do watch out for red herrings, and try as many options and actions as possible in each location. Highly recommended. Coding has already begun on a follow-up game to *Caren and the Tangled Tentacles*. Judging by this one, it's going to be something to really look forward to!

Download Caren v1.1 (official release):
http://csdb.dk/release/?id=141659
Website: http://martinwendt.de/caren/
Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/carengame/
Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25JvL_Rdgo

Atmosphere	88%
Interaction	90%
Lasting Interest	80%
Value for Money	100%
Overall	**90%**

Hibernated 1

Pond Software, free download, physical release with extras TBA

Stefan Vogt's *Hibernated 1* is all set to be the first interactive fiction (pure text adventure) release by Pond Software, a hobbyist retro gamedev team and non-profit software publisher which has only been around for a couple of years but is rapidly growing in popularity and reputation.

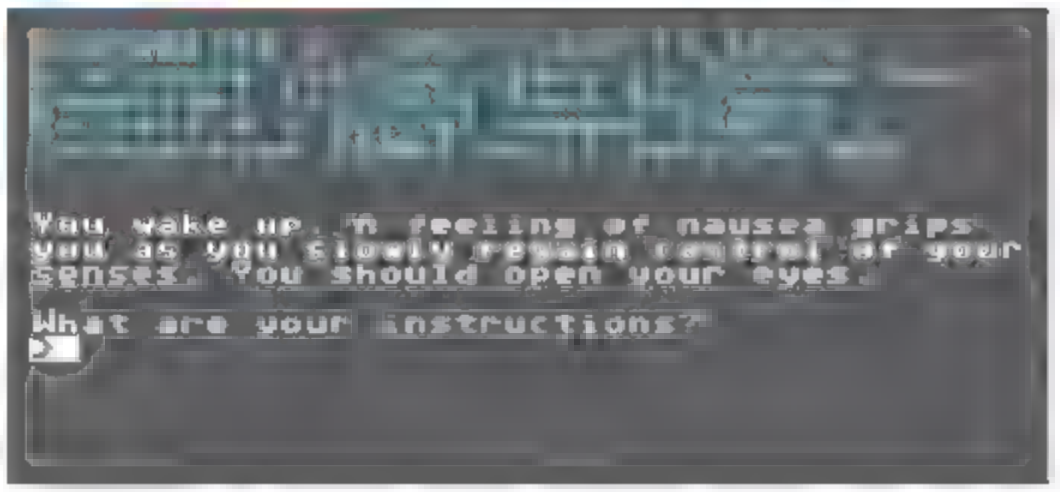
The central question posed by this brand-new science fiction based game is, what do you do when you wake up unexpectedly from hypersleep after a rather chilly 200-year snooze, find yourself just two-thirds of the way through a 1,200 light year journey from the solar system to the real (and nicely-referenced) Kepler-62 system, and discover that you are most definitely not alone? The protagonist astronaut Olivia Lund, who has been sent on a mission of exploration by the Terran Alliance – reflects a modern trend in science fiction which sees more female role models taking front and centre, certainly no bad thing. Olivia also has an electronic 'companion', which is provided to help the player as much as anything. Her (and now, your) sidekick 'Io' is an AI (Artificial Intelligence). Just as well Io is here to help, because Olivia's ship, the Polaris 7, has been grabbed by a tractor beam from a massive extra-terrestrial starship, which appears oddly lifeless, and which, inevitably, must be entered to solve the adventure, so she's going to need a friend!

At first glance, you might think from the theme that *Hibernated 1* (cheerily subtitled 'This place is death') was inspired by the legendary *Snowball* from Level 9, but this is apparently not the case, and the resemblance is only superficial. In fact, the author says he missed out on playing *Snowball* back in his youth, and only recently acquired, and has not yet played, that particular game. Moreover, *Snowball*, with its end-game, boasted over 200 locations, and *Hibernated 1* rather less at 50 – though some of those locations, which are after all in an enclosed environment (a spaceship) are cleverly reused, as you can do more than one thing there.

Stefan reckons the story, rather than pointing to any particular lineage from past classics of adventure gaming, takes its vibe from 1980s pop culture and especially the literary science fiction books of greats like Isaac Asimov and (some of you will remember, especially if you are German) the massive series of Perry Rhodan space opera paperbacks, which are, it has to be said, at opposite ends of the SF spectrum, making for a diverse inspiration and both amusing references and black comedy. Certainly, the game's text is thoughtful, and carefully thought out, which makes it an engaging, and in places exciting, read. Just as well, as there are no graphics, so your imagination will be in overdrive, as it would be with reading a book.

***Hibernated 1* will be a free download but the very affordable physical disk- or cassette-based packages Pond put out will come with superb art by Vanja Utne – her sketch here for Spiderbot.**

In fact, the first game screen makes it clear that the author does, in fact, see this as a story and not just a game, which is encouraging. *Hibernated 1* is more out to tell you that story than leave you pulling out your hair (which is just as well for this particular White Wizard, as too much of it has gone already!). On this basis, *Hibernated 1* is in practice more modern interactive fiction and less frustrating, puzzle oriented headbanger than some of its spiritual predecessors of the 1980s,

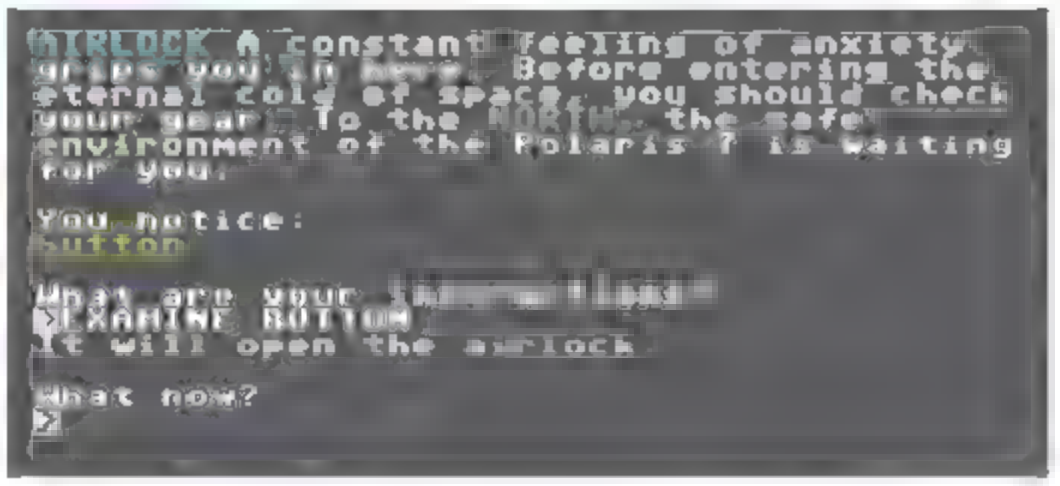


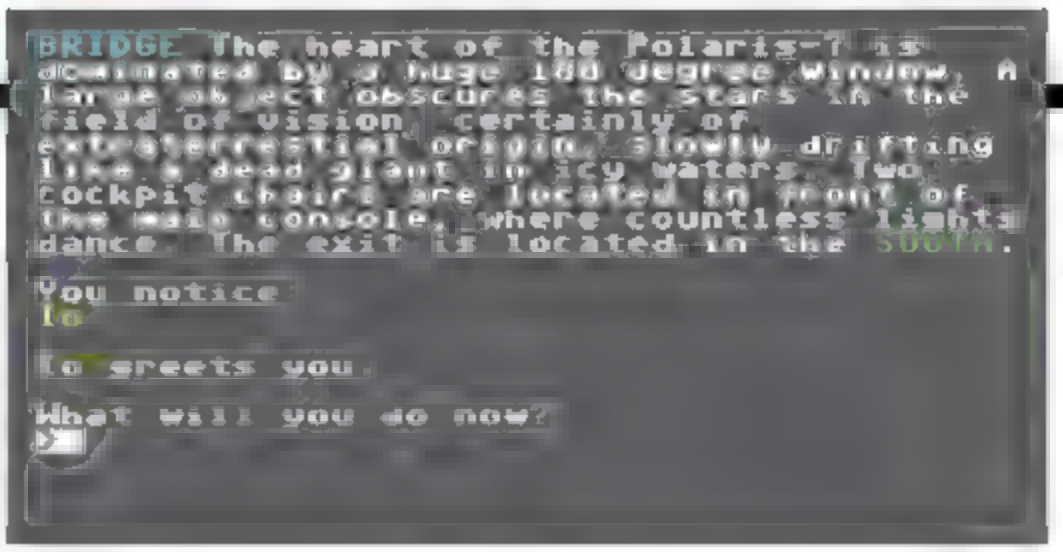
being heavily based on progress levels. The modus operandi of the game is to offer the player more of a movie-style experience than earlier text adventures. Stefan has also put a lot of effort into making the command structure work with you rather than against you, and while it's still a verb-noun parser system, it does recognise more synonyms than many earlier adventures, and has a hint system for the terminally confused.

There are still challenges though, otherwise it wouldn't be much of an adventure, now would it? Don't forget – examine as much as you can! Don't waste time on things you don't need to do, as success in the game is dependent on progress. Listen to Io's little hints, which may give you useful clues. And do try not to die.

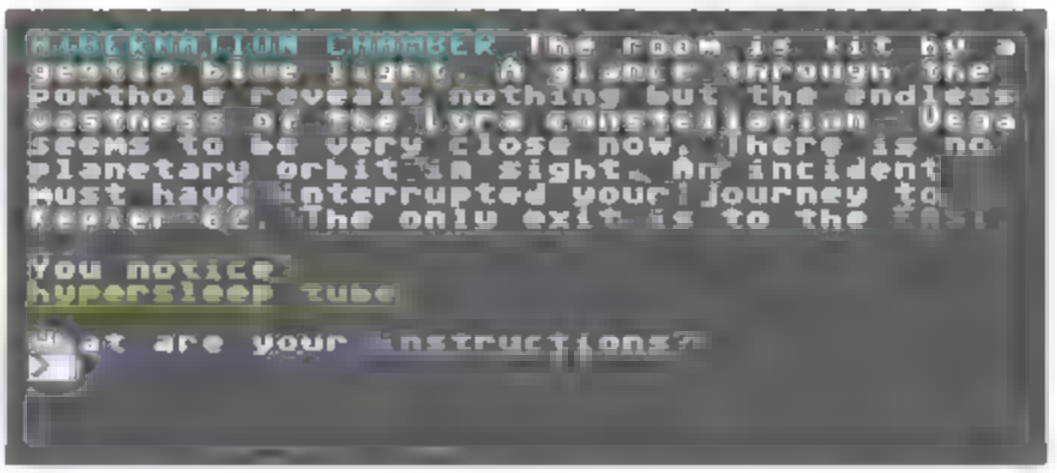
Stefan has received much good advice from a legend of the UK adventure industry who is well known to this Wizard, one Tim Gilberts of Gilsoft fame (*The Quill: The Professional Adventure Writing System*). *Hibernated 1* was created using an unpublished version of *The Quill* provided by the master himself, a version which offers potential for even more sophisticated games in future. Exciting news!

Hibernated 1 will, by the time you read this, be available to download from the Pond Software website for free – which sounds like amazing value, until you look at the wonderful





and very affordable physical disk or cassette-based packages which they produce, often with superb art by Vanja Utne. Apparently, the physical version of this game will also come with stickers and feelies, and Pond are currently even considering a Terran Alliance Polaris Expedition patch for you to stick on your spacesuit! True adventurers will definitely want the whole kit and caboodle if they can lay their hands on it. The physical release of *Hibernated 1* (later in 2018) will also come with a bonus adventure, namely the same events but with a different (and unexpected) central character, and an untold part of the story, which should be very interesting.



Conclusion

This new game has certainly surprised me, pleasantly, and it proves yet again that not only is there life in the old dog yet, whether it be the text adventure or indeed *The Quill*, but also in the end it's the story that matters in adventure games/interactive fiction, and a text adventure can do that as well or better than any graphics-based game. On this basis alone, I highly recommend *Hibernated 1*, and look forward to future adventures from Stefan Vogt and Pond Software. There are at least another two to come in the *Hibernated Trilogy*, as I'm told that Pond are keen to revive the genre – I can't wait for a box set!

To download or order Hibernated 1, visit Pond Software's website: http://pondsoft.uk
For further information:
http://pondsoft.uk/hibernated.html

Atmosphere	78%
Interaction	80%
Lasting Interest	90%
Value for Money	100%
Overall	**87%**

Heroes & Cowards – The Pentagram of Power

Protovision, currently download only, $5.99USD

Heroes & Cowards – The Pentagram of Power is a fun adventure game for the Commodore 64, but quite different to the more arcane verb-noun parser games of old. It's actually kind of a pseudo point-and-click adventure, with the protagonist's (that's you, Wand Wielder) command and dialogue input being menu-driven via an action window, with input simply by joystick or arrow-keys. Movement is also by stick or key, and each time you arrive in a new location, the screen describes the place in both graphics (above) and text (windowed below), together with player status.

This makes this game ideal for new adventure gamers (or those who have been on the mead), who may have trouble trying to guess which words the parser will accept in text-based adventures, or those looking for something a bit different or more modern. It's also a pretty stylish take on dungeon-crawler-ish graphics, with very attractive use of colour and shading considering the limitations of the platform (hey, less of the brown comments from the back there. Somebody cast that Speccy user into the Bog of Eternal Stench!)

According to publishers Protovision, our hero (that's you again) was just settling down to a comfy night in front of his TV when he was suddenly banished to a distant, medieval world by a mysterious force. The inhabitants of the cosy little country of Dartenwood have, it seems, been turned to stone by a very unpleasant fellow, the magician, Morlon – and only the Pentagram of Power can break his evil curse. However, the Pentagram's rubies, essential to your mission, are scattered throughout the land, and . . . Well, you can guess the rest.

You being the 'chosen one', of course, all hopes for getting things under control and performing a rocky resurrection for the good folk of Dartenwood are now resting on your broad shoulders. Yep, it's all up to you

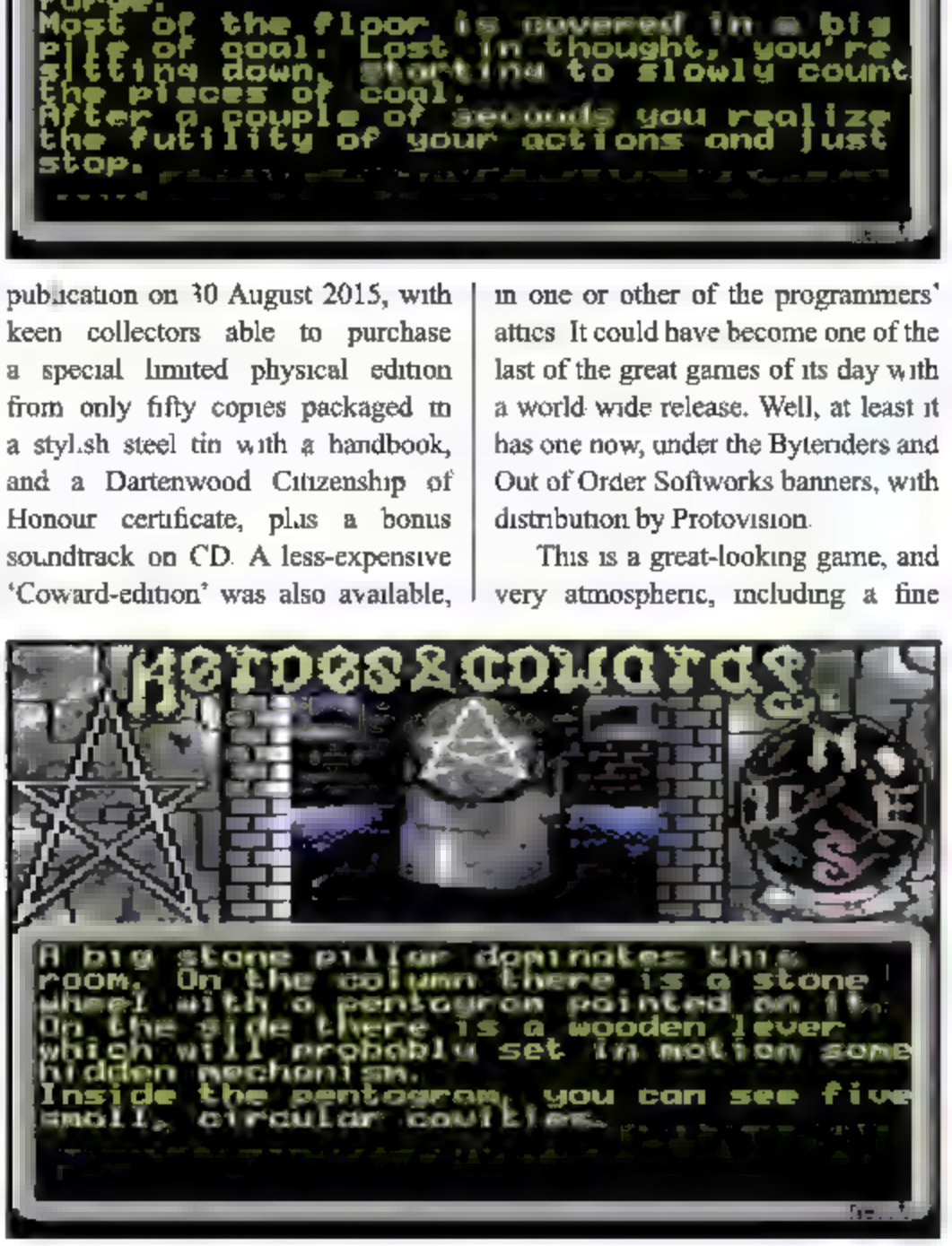
'twas ever thus. That TV and comfy armchair looks (literally) a world away, and you've a long journey to take, avoiding deadly danger and solving unsolvable riddles on the way Do you wanna be a hero, or are you a quitter? No, I didn't think so. Of course, I might be mistaken

Published in German and English, the original 'Hero-edition' issue of the game sold out rapidly, following

publication on 30 August 2015, with keen collectors able to purchase a special limited physical edition from only fifty copies packaged in a stylish steel tin with a handbook, and a Dartenwood Citizenship of Honour certificate, plus a bonus soundtrack on CD. A less-expensive 'Coward-edition' was also available, with manual and a keychain, but no citizenship or music CD At the time of writing, however, only digital download editions are available, priced from $5 99 USD or above.

A product of the German Bytenders partnership of Steve Kaps and Sebastian Broghammer, who were prominent in Germany in the early 1990s, but who disappeared from the adventure scene after winning a competition prize of DM 20,000 (€10,000) from Computer Verlag with their game *Brubaker* in 1992, it is a great pity *Heroes & Cowards* took so long to come to market, the prototype lurking as it did for years in one or other of the programmers' attics It could have become one of the last of the great games of its day with a world wide release. Well, at least it has one now, under the Bytenders and Out of Order Softworks banners, with distribution by Protovision.

This is a great-looking game, and very atmospheric, including a fine



medieval-esque music soundtrack. Gameplay is fun, but less challenging than the text-driven magnetic scrolls of old. On this basis, you couldn't really call it interactive fiction in the same way as Infocom, Scott Adams and Level 9 games are. But still, it is a fine game, especially if you are more inclined to the arcade side of things.

Conclusion

The White Wizard was off wandering in the Demon Dimensions when this finally came out, and so was unable to conjure up a tasty tinned version at the time, but is more than happy to recommend the various digital download editions to bold adventurers and especially fellow Wand Wielders looking to give their keyboards a rest and engage in a spot of joystick wiggling (or possibly mouse wrangling, if you have any in your personal dungeon).

Sadly, *Heroes & Cowards — The Pentagram of Power* is something of a tale of both triumph and tragedy, as Steve Kaps passed away following a heart attack on 26 December, 2015 Our sympathies go to his friends and family

For further info, availability and download options, check out the Protovison website:

https://protovision.itch.io/heroes-cowards

Atmosphere	81%
Interaction	75%
Lasting Interest	70%
Value for Money	100%
Overall	**82%**

Wizard Tips

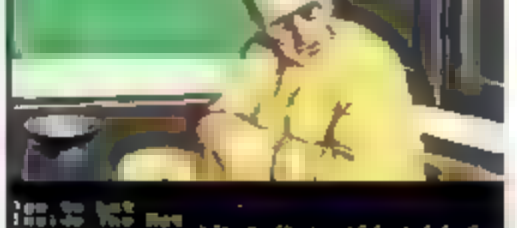
Finding the adventuring life a little tricky? Wandering aimlessly without a clue? The White Wizard casts the runes and peers into his scrying-glass to help you along the path less travelled

Never Ending Story

Luck shall you need, should you cross the sands. Carry yon flame from West to East; take up the glass to blind the Beast.

Robin of Sherwood

Serf all ye way to Nottingham town. Enter the camp, and much will come your way

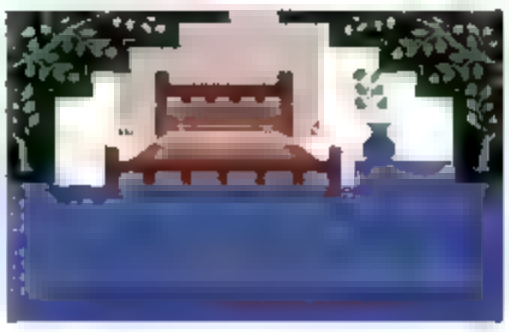


Lord of the Rings

Wear not the Ring for long, weakness it brings. Remember your inner hobbit when tackling the barge

The Pawn

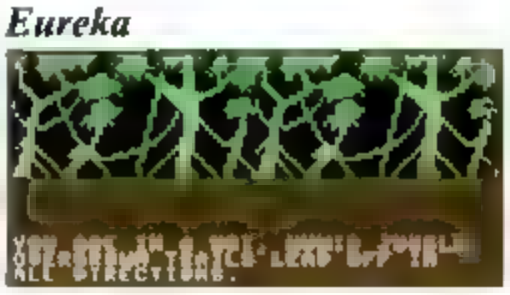
Having the horse, set the Princess astride and ride out. If nay, rope your bed and descend via the window



Snowqueen

Be sure to pay Granny lip-service afore ye go.

Eureka



Fungi will aid your passage at the river of fire. Your lips may save you from the serpent

ZORK I

Sustenance for the Cyclops will smooth your way Dig, dig, dig, dig.

Planetfall

Observe the panel next to the annunciator; its colour will solve the button in the machine shop. Floyd will get shiny Frotnitz

Dracula

The coach is cold, beware lest you catch a chill. Lift the seat, the cross is your key; put and turn.

The Very Big Cave Adventure

What a load of bull! Truly an abomination .

Ol' Whitey's Wizard News

MURDLOK a lost adventure rediscovered

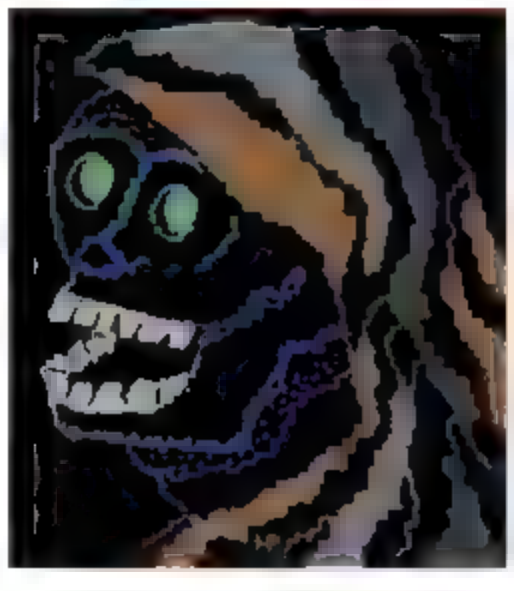
Peter Hempel/Pagetable, FREE download

Liberate the land from the evil Murdlok! Reflection, not recklessness will guide you to your goal!

Murdlok is a long-forgotten German text and graphics adventure game which, despite being written in the mid-1980s, was never released Authored by hobbyist Peter Hempel, about whom little was initially known, both the game and the author were rediscovered by Michael Steil and made available on his website pagetable.com in February, 2018 Mr Steil then joined forces with Lisa Brodner to create an English translation of the game, which is also on the site.

Since the news of *Murdlok* first arrived on pagetable.com, further information has come to light, courtesy of the author, who was born in 1957 and lives in Berlin, Germany According to Mr Hempel, he began writing the game in 1984 85 after he bought a Commodore 64, a disk drive and a portable colour TV. He began learning BASIC, and although he was not a professional programmer (he was an electronics technician, specialising in servicing German traffic lights) he was very enthusiastic and spent all his spare time on this new hobby

Personal experience of playing adventure games then put him on the path to writing his own, and having



read *Adventures and How to Program Them* (in German, *Adventures und wie man sie programmiert*) by Jörg Walkowiak (Data Becker, 1984), Peter began to plan the design, story and graphics for what was to become *Murdlok*. He even created a new character set for the game, using a font editor laboriously typed in from the *64'er* magazine, from which he also obtained a sprite editor

After studying machine language for beginners he also created a modified loading routine in the disk buffer. All this programming took a great deal of time Eventually the listing became so long that he decided he needed a printer, and bought one, which helped him optimise the code to save memory

With a girlfriend and growing family to consider, time grew shorter, and so the game could not be finished until 1986 Sadly, instead of releasing *Murdlok* Peter decided that the market was by then so full of games that he felt no-one would be interested, which he now regrets, feeling it was probably a mistake And so, like a legend fading back into the mists of time, *Murdlok* was hidden away and forgotten

How did *Murdlok* come back into the light? Well, having purchased a Commodore C65 in 2017, Peter's enthusiasm was fired up once more, and having met Michael Steil they got together to publish the game, at very long last, on pagetable.com, so that all C64 adventurers could enjoy it even on the C65. Now, that really is a happy ending!

English version download.
http ://www.pagetable.com/docs/murdlok_murdlok_en.d64
German version download
http ://www.pagetable.com/docs/murdlok_murdlok_de.d64
Source: Pagetable website
https ://www.pagetable.com

Classic Infocom Games Upgraded

Several classic Infocom text adventure games have had their displays upgraded to 53 column width instead of the Commodore 64's standard 40 columns The slower, but still useful bitmap mode text display is also made clearer by changing from the computer's default low-contrast display to a higher contrast white text with a darker background This has been done by CSDb and Forum 64 member 'Bit shifter', who has re-written the Infocom Z-machine interpreter
See: http://csdb.dk/scener/?id=30535

Unknown Realms Entered with New RPG

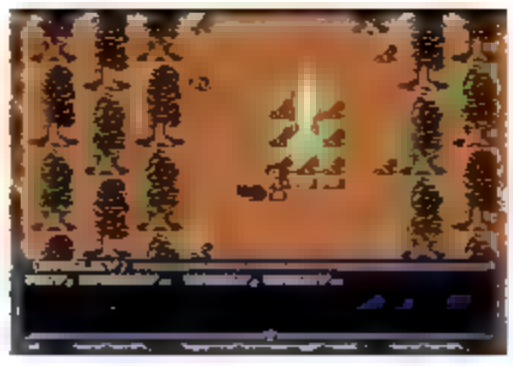
A new, Kickstarter funded RPG is now in development following a successful campaign from Stirring Dragon Games. Unusually, the game, *Unknown Realm The Siege Perilous*, is being developed for both the C64 and PC/Mac. What has been seen so far looks very promising, but there is a way to go yet
See: http://www.stirringdragon.games/

New RPG in Progress

Message ravens have brought news of a work in progress by Sarah Jane Avory, who is busily creating a brand-new role-playing game on the Commodore 64, called *Briley Witch*

Sarah Jane is an old-school 8-bit programmer who started coding on a VIC-20, then progressed to a C64 It was the C64 that gained her first job in the computer games industry, and she has been working in it ever since Intriguingly, she's also a part-time writer, which bodes well for the storytelling element of her games Currently a full time computer games programmer, Sarah Jane has written and self-published fourteen books so far These include a ten-book series entitled *The Briley Witch Chronicles*, but after writing so many books she was suffering a bit of burn out, and decided to 'take a break' by coding a C64 RPG for fun in her spare time, and to take her back to her old, fun, 8-bit days!

The new RPG is based upon her Briley witch books, so players can in future expect a story about witches,



Hybrid Adventure/RPG Game in Development

Ultimate Newcomer from distributor Protovision is an ambitious hybrid game under development for the C64, being part classic adventure, part RPG. Produced by Cinematic Intuitive Dynamix, it will expand on earlier versions of *Newcomer* and contains situations and encounters like those found in adventure games and tabletop roleplaying. The game interface and controls are similar to old – school role playing games.

The emphasis is on interacting with a large (180+) and diverse cast of characters, exploring, developing a wide range of skills, and solving complex puzzles and mysteries.
See: https://www.protovision.games/development/ultimate_newcomer.php?language=en

PROTOVISION

Lost Adventure Found

Almost antiquated news, but still excellent, is that in 2014 a lost C64 text and graphics adventure game by Dutch developer John Vanderaart came to light by devious means, and ended up being made available on the Games That Weren't website. *Aurum*, which was intended to be

released by Radarsoft, was produced by John in 1987, and apparently reviewed in a Dutch magazine, but it disappeared. John left the development scene around 1987/88. This good-looking piece of work is now available as a download in Dutch and English.

C64 P-&-C Adventure

Under the heading of 'belated news', 2015 saw the arrival of another interesting point-and-click

adventure game for the Commodore that is well worth checking out. In *Awakening*, our hero is a female courier who has to deliver a package to a building. From this point, everything goes downhill. Can she (you) avert disaster with the aid of your joystick and text menu? Not in the same league as *Caren and the Tangled Tentacles*, but worth a download.
See: http://csdb.dk/release/?id=140959

Ol' Whitey's Christmas List o' Classic Stocking Filler Adventures

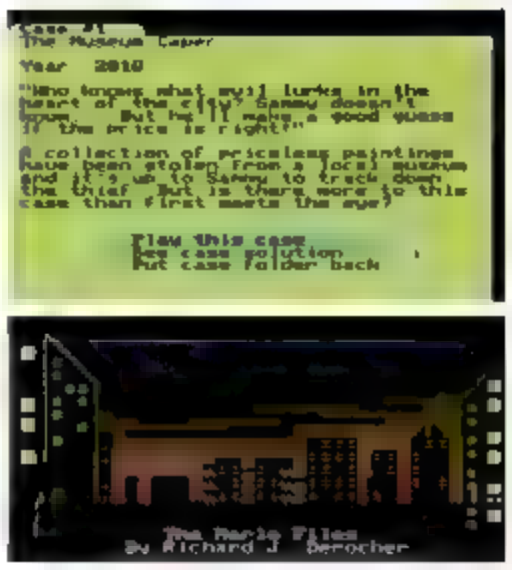
We know most of you Wand Wielders, Space Aces and Sword Slingers out there will likely have a choice library of favourite adventure games on your shelves (or under the bed) but in case you're just setting out on your quest, or looking for new directions in collecting, here are the Snowy Sorceror Supreme's personal recommendations of some classic quests for your festive treasure chest. There are many more out there, just waiting to be found. Good hunting, adventurers!

Game	Publisher	Programmer
Adventureland	Adventure International	Scott Adams
Adventure Quest	Level 9 Computing	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Castle of Terror	Melbourne House	Grahame Willis and Peter Falconer
Colossal Adventure	Level 9 Computing	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Crystal Frog	Sentient Software	Unknown
Dallas Quest, The	Datasoft/US Gold	James Garon
Diary of Adrian Mole	Mosaic/Level 9	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Dungeon Adventure	Level 9 Computing	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Emerald Isle	Level 9 Computing	Shaun D. Abbott
Empire of Karn	Interceptor Micros	Ian Gray
Erik the Viking	Mosaic/Level 9	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Eureka!	Domark	Andras Ceaszar
Fahrenheit 451	Trillium Corp.	Michael P. Meyer and Jeffrey Schneider
Golden Baton	Adventure International	Brian Howarth
Gremlins	Adventure International	Brian Howarth
Heroes of Karn	Interceptor Micros	Ian Gray
Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy	Infocom/Softsel	Steve Meretzky
Hobbit, The (cassette+book)	Melbourne House	Philip Mitchell and Gregg Barnett
Hobbit, The (disk)	Melbourne House	Philip Mitchell and Gregg Barnett
Hulk, The (Questprobe)	Adventure International	[redacted]
Lancelot	Level 9 Computing	John Jones-Steele
Lords of Time	Level 9 Computing	Mike P. Bryant, Nick Austin
Mindshadow	Activision	Sue Gazzard
Mordon's Quest	Melbourne House	Bill Heineman
Neuromancer	Mediagenic	Peter Moreland, Peter Donne and John
Pirate Adventure	Adventure International	Troy A. Miles
Red Moon	Level 9 Computing	Scott Adams
Return to Eden	Level 9 Computing	David Williamson, Simon Aspinall
Robin of Sherwood	Adventure International	[redacted]
Seas of Blood	Adventure International	Nick Austin and Chris Queen
Secret of St Brides, The	Audiogenic	Mike Woodroffe and Brian Howarth
Secret Mission	Adventure International	Mike Woodroffe and Alan Cox
Sherlock	Melbourne House	Priscilla Langridge
Snowball	Level 9 Computing	Scott Adams
Sorceror	Infocom/Softsel	Philip Mitchell and Gregg Barnett
Sorceror of Claymorgue Castle, The	Adventure International	Pete, Mike and Nick Austin
Spiderman (Questprobe)	Adventure International	Steve Meretzky
Subsunk	Firebird	Scott Adams
Suspect	Infocom/Softsel	Scott Adams
Ten Little Indians	Adventure International	Peter Torrance and Colin Liddle
Time Machine	Adventure International	Dave Lebling
Tracer Sanction, The	Activision	Brian Howarth
Valkyrie 17	[redacted]	Brian Howarth
Voodoo Castle	Adventure International	Unknown
Waxworks	Adventure International	George Stone
Witch's Cauldron, The	Mikro-Gen	Scott Adams
Wrath of Magra	Mastertronic	Brian Howarth and Cliff Ogden
Zork I, II & III	Infocom/Commodore	Unknown
		Marc Blank and Dave Lebling

magic and, naturally, talking cats, all based within an Anglo-Saxon-esque world. Sarah Jane has been working on the game for just over a year now, and is just over half-way through the coding. She says she still has plenty to do, but is having lots of fun doing it! I'm sure C64 gamers will be having even more fun once the game is released. For more info about Sarah Jane Avory's work in progress – both games and books – which the White Wizard will be keeping a beady eye on himself, why not check out her blog
https://sarahjaneavory.wordpress.com/
You will also find her active on Twitter:
https://twitter.com/SarahJaneAvory

Lurking in the Depths

Also belated – but good – news from 2015, was the release of the remastered edition of *The Marlo Files*, a text adventure from Binary Legends, which was developed using the *Quest Writer* adventure game maker. The game is in fact a combination of two separate adventures, with a new title screen and a few tweaks and changes to some puzzles. In the first tale Sammy Marlo is a private eye searching for stolen paintings, followed then by his efforts to find the missing scientist in *Dial M for Marlo*.
See: http://csdb.dk/release/?id=138347



SCOTT ADAMS

THE SUPERHEROES' SUPERHERO

SCOTT ADAMS is considered by many to be the father of the computer adventure game industry. A true pioneer of computer games and a legend among adventurers, Scott and his first wife, Alexis, set up one of the earliest computer games companies, Adventure International, at Longwood, Florida, USA in 1978. **Stuart Williams** recently interviewed Scott, who now lives with his second wife, Roxanne, in Platteville, Wisconsin, USA, about his life, his past work – and about his exciting recent return to the games development industry.

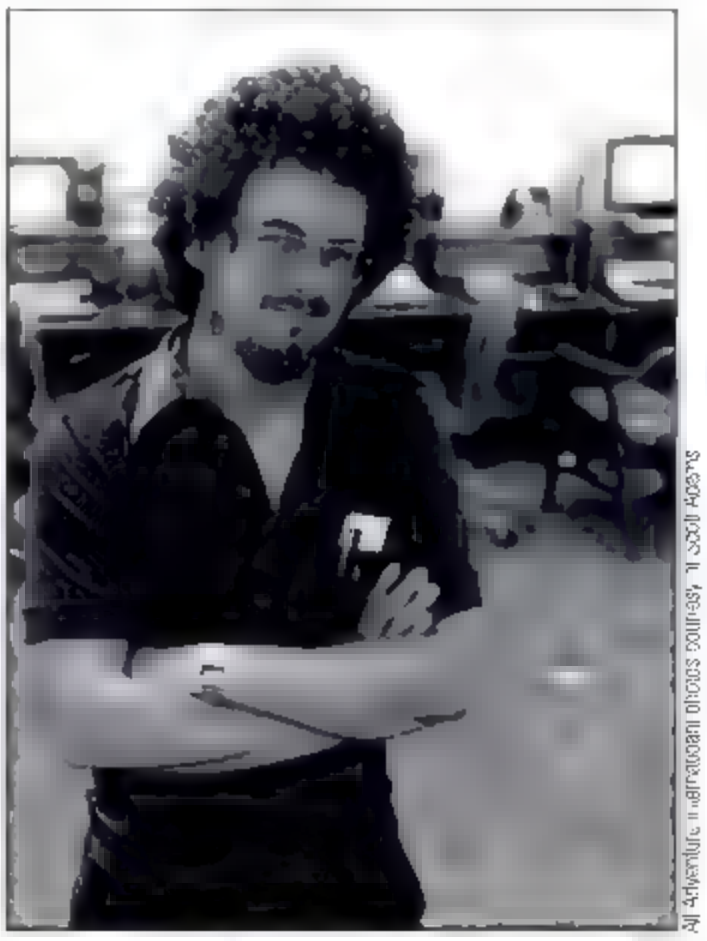
S.W. Scott, thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to be interviewed for the new Chronicles of the White Wizard! Many of our readers who are long-standing adventure gamers will have fond memories of your pioneering work, even if they didn't always find the challenges of those now-legendary early games easy to overcome! Others will be fascinated to hear something for the first time about the classic games you published through your company Adventure International, many of which were initially created for early personal computers like the Tandy TRS-80, the Apple II and, of course, the Commodore Pet, the ancestor of the VIC 20 and Commodore 64. And more will also, I know, be excited to learn of your latest ventures.

Can I ask you first – since you were born in 1952 – as a child, did you have any particular idea of what you wanted to do when you grew up? The whole idea of computers was often seen as just so much 'Buck Rogers stuff' back then, did you think about that early on, and did you have any interest in science or science fiction as a child?

S.A. I loved SF as a child! I read everything I could get my hands on: magazines, books, short stories, etc. My parents thought I should become a doctor. I was even accepted into the pre-med program at University of Miami in 11th grade, but I talked my parents out of sending me early. I didn't feel ready to skip my last year of high school and jump right into college. I'm glad they let me finish with the rest of my class. The following year, I got to experience first-hand programming on a computer while at my high school. It was a huge turning point in my path.

S.W. When computers finally came on your horizon, how did you get involved with them? Were they a big part of your education? What kind of computers? And when did you decide to make a career in computing?

S.A. I self-taught myself to program in APL in high school. After that, I knew that computers were what I wanted to do. My senior year of high school, they got a terminal to a mainframe at the University of Miami. It was an IBM Selectric typewriter with an APL/360 ball to be able to have all the Greek characters of APL. There was a telephone and an audio modem (110 baud?) sitting next to it. Over the school year I spent a lot of time on that terminal. I got permission from the school to come in early when the janitor was there and to stay late and be locked into the school. I would stay till 9 or 10 o'clock. That summer, I got permission from the local junior college to have an account on their mainframe and I continued my self-studies in computer programming until it was time to go to college.



All Adventure International photos courtesy of Scott Adams

Scott Adams at Adventure International in the late 1970s

I then went to Florida Tech (Florida Institute of Technology) for my Bachelors of Science in Computer Science. While there, I finagled a job in the school's computer IT department. I started just helping put mailing labels manually on alumni newsletters. Within three years, I was completely in charge of writing and maintaining the school's payroll and accounting software. I was awarded free tuition for my efforts, which was definitely nice!

I had unlimited access to the school's mainframe Xerox Sigma 7 computer. Not everyone else did. All of the other students either had to drop off their work so it could be run overnight or used an ancient Honeywell DDP24 computer that had been donated by NASA. One of my class assignments was to write a small program on the DDP24. There were long lines in the lab where the computer was, so I came up with a better idea. Because of my access to the Xerox mainframe, I wrote a simulator of the DDP24, then I wrote an assembler for the machine. Then I did all my homework on that instead of having to wait for the lines to get on the DDP24 in the lab. When the professor learned what I had done, he had me guest lecture a class and explain everything I had developed!

S.W. I understand your brother built the first computer you had in your home. How did that come about? What was it like having such an amazing device in the family, and how did it affect your family life, and your personal interests?

S.A. In 1975, my two younger brothers and I were all going to college and living in a house together. Eric and Richard are both extremely talented. We were always tinkering with things. Richard built a 16-bit computer from bit slice chips. Eric constructed a TV Typewriter that allowed keyboard input to display the characters on the TV screen. I then wrote a *Spacewar!* type game for it that supported two players controlling their own ship along with numerous other things flying about. It was in 2D and just used alphanumeric characters to represent ships and hazards. As far as we know, it was the world's first 16-bit home computer game to be created. There is more information about this on the sidebar at my webpage, www.msadams.com

S.W. It's generally accepted that Will Crowther's *Colossal Cave Adventure* game of 1976 was the first such program, or at least the first to become widely known. When did you first encounter text adventure games, and what did you think of them to begin with?

S.A. I got a chance to play *Colossal Cave Adventure* while working at Stromberg-Carlson in Lake Mary, Florida. I was working there as a programmer and the IT department got the game on the mainframe. I came into work early every day for a week and stayed late after work to play the game. I loved it. I finished it within the week and knew I wanted to make a game along the same lines.

S.W. You are famous for being the first person to have programmed an adventure game for a personal computer, and indeed for one of the first mass-produced home computers, the Tandy Radio Shack TRS-80 Model I. That first game was *Adventureland*. It must have been quite a challenge, shoehorning the kind of game previously only run on mainframes and minicomputers into such a tiny amount of memory, and with such a crude storage device?

S.A. When I got the idea to create an adventure game for the personal computer, I shared it with friends at work. They all scoffed at me and said it was impossible that such a toy computer could host a game like that. Everyone knew *Colossal Cave* required an entire mainframe to run on. I decided to tackle it in stages. Instead of hard coding a game (like *CC* was), I made my own adventure gaming language. I wrote a compiler to compress it and then wrote an interpreter to execute it. All this was originally done in BASIC as it was a new language at the time and I was anxious to learn it. I later converted everything to assembly language to give me even more room for the game.

S.W. I understand that you were the first person to sell an adventure game commercially? What gave you the idea to sell computer games, and particularly adventures? Why was *Adventureland* the first game you decided to sell?

S.A. I had sold a previous game called *Dog Race* to the local Radio Shack store. It was a poor excuse for a game, but I sold about ten copies. I always had an entrepreneurial spirit from a young age. I remember one year taking over the family garage and building a large slot car set up. I then rented it out to neighbourhood kids for 15-minute intervals. I've always loved to create things. Once I had *Adventureland* working, I decided to see how it would do. Initially, I sold it via classified ads in I think it was *Softside* magazine. Later, computer dealers approached me to sell the game in their stores and Adventure International (AI) was born.

S.W. On the strength of the response you got from that first game, which you started making and selling from home, what reaction did you get to your pioneering arrival in the commercial marketplace?

S.A. The games sold extremely well. Because of their success, we branched into publishing other authors' efforts as well. Adventure International had a fairly extensive catalogue at the time, including many business software entries [and arcade-style games].

S.W. When you set up Adventure International, the only mass-produced personal computers generally available were the TRS 80, the original Apple II, and the Commodore Pet, with the Atari 800 arriving a little later. Which of these pretty expensive devices did you prefer using yourself, and why? How did you adapt your programming techniques for this?

S.A. Of the big three, I ended up with the TRS 80 Model I, Level II BASIC, 16K. It had the biggest bang for the buck at the time and was readily available locally. Since I already knew mainframe assembler, it was very easy to pick up the assembly language used in these machines. Z80 and 6502. Of the two CPUs the Z80 was far more powerful.

S.W. Which were your personal favourites from the games that Adventure International created for these pioneering computers that had built a world-spanning industry? What were your favourite themes for adventure games and which did you programme yourself?

S.A. We had an arcade game called *Sea Dragon** and another game called *StarFighter*† that I enjoyed. We later licensed the name to the movie *The Last Starfighter* by the way. I greatly enjoyed working with Marvel Comics and creating games in the Marvel universe. I wrote all my classic adventure games, except for three that I was editor on. *Buckaroo Banzai* [full title *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai: Across the Eighth Dimension*] was primarily done by Russ Whetmore and Kem McNair (in-house staff), *Pyramid of Doom* by Alvin Files (an outside author) and *Golden Voyage* by William Demas (also an outside author).

S.W. Other US companies like Infocom and On-Line Systems (later Sierra On-Line), and in the UK, Level 9, Zenobi Software and many others, followed in your footsteps and also began creating their own legends in the adventure games arena. Did you admire any particular games from the competition?

S.A. I lost a week of my life playing *Wizardry* [Sir-Tech] and loved it! Unfortunately, I did not get much of a chance to play other games.

S.W. At the beginning of the 1980s, and with new production methods being introduced, the next generation of personal computers began to arrive; these were much more affordable machines from Commodore, and eventually Sinclair, Acorn, Tandy Radio Shack and others. Did you find yourself, and Adventure International, under a lot of pressure to produce games for these new kids on the block when the time came?

S.A. My game engine was easy to port to new platforms, so it was not a problem. Once the engine was ported, all the games in the series were instantly available for that new platform.

S.W. The Commodore VIC-20 of 1980 was the first of the new affordable home computers to be provided for by Adventure International. That must have been a real challenge, since the base machine only had 3.5K of RAM? Was this why all your VIC-20 games were on cartridge?

S.A. Yes, this was one machine that I originally planned to skip. Commodore approached me and asked me to put some of my games on it; they would take care of manufacturing and selling what I made. That's why only five games came out, and they were all on cartridge. It was worth working around the issue of such a small RAM though! All five Commodore VIC-20 games I made turned out to be run-away best sellers.

S.W. With the advent of the Commodore 64 and others, Adventure International left the text-based games for the ageing VIC-20, the Tandy range and

The 'toy computer' — Tandy Radio Shack TRS-80 Model I

* written by Wayne Westmoreland and Terry Gilman

† written by Sparky Starks

Scott Adams in office mode and **right** the staff outside The Dome, Adventure International's purpose-built headquarters

Texas TI99 4a, and moved into games combining text and graphics. Did graphic adventures boost popularity and sales? Was it necessary to take on many more staff?

S.A. With the advent of colour for home computers, buyers were asking for colour graphic computer games. To meet the demand, Adventure International did hire additional staff to help with the extra work.

S.W. Your company was primarily a US operation But many new markets for home computers and software opened up during the 1980s, especially in the UK, where we saw a revolution in affordable home and educational computing. Did you recognise a need to work with other companies to expand into other countries, especially the UK?

S.A. We had affiliated companies in Japan and the UK. The UK Company was called Adventure International UK and it had both UK and European markets. They did well, and I still get fan mail from European fans in France, Spain, and Italy besides the large fan base in the UK.

S.W. Adventure International UK (later Adventure Soft) was established by Mike Woodroffe in Sutton Coldfield and Birmingham, England, first as an importer and reseller of Adventure International games, then converting games for the UK market, and later created its own original product range. What can you recall of that partnership, working with Mike and Simon Woodroffe, and later Brian Howarth, who they brought in to help with conversions of Adventure International titles after he had published his own collection of Mysterious Adventures?

Scott and a couple of familiar superheroes promoting the Questprobe games with programmer Brian Howarth (**left**) and Mike Woodroffe of Adventure International UK

S.A. Adventure International UK did the conversion to non-US platforms such as Sinclair and others. Machines that had a major US presence such as Commodore were done in the States. I met Brian Howarth one time on a trip to the UK. I taught him how to use my adventure writing system, and he was then tasked with converting the engine to the other European platforms. I understand he later went on to write his own series of games based on my engine that seemed to have a good following. I have not been in touch with him since then, but I hope everything has turned out well for him. He seemed to be very talented. I enjoyed working with Mike Woodroffe, but do not remember Simon at all. One of my favourite memories was Mike taking me and my wife to a live performance of *Singing in the Rain* with Tommy Steele and he rented the Queen's box for us. It was a marvellous performance and a memory of England I cherish to this day.

S.W. In 1984, you acquired one of the first ever licenses to produce games based on Marvel Comics; these graphic adventures were sold under the Questprobe banner, together with their own dedicated, but physically smaller, Marvel Comics. They were produced for the Acorn Electron, Atari 8-bit, BBC Micro, Commodore 64, DOS, Dragon 32, ZX Spectrum and later Amstrad CPC, with sequels planned for each following year. Those must have been exciting times.

S.A. I had tremendous fun working with Marvel on those titles. They were the pinnacle of Adventure International's run. From what I can remember, the Atari 400/800/1200 was the most popular computer with Commodore 64 and Apple II following that.

S.W. The original plan was for a series of twelve Questprobe games, but Adventure International's bankruptcy in 1985 brought a premature end to the line, sadly with only three published. How did the end of Adventure International come about?

S.A. There were a number of issues that caused Adventure International to fail. The major one was bad decisions on my part. I allowed Commodore computers to become a publisher for the Marvel series of games. Their packaging was bad and their promotion of the games even worse. Also, at that time we had just done a major set of games for the TI-99/4a – including the world's first (and probably last) full graphic text adventure as a 16-bit cartridge. Just as the games came out TI decided to quit the computer market and only the first run of cartridges were made. A big disappointment. In any case, it was a great time being able to work with the talented people at Marvel. The best part about the gaming industry (and technology), is that things are always progressing. Even if our company wasn't able to continue past 1985, I'm really glad that we got to be a part of everything that was happening.

S.W. The copyrights for Adventure International's games reverted to the bank, and eventually back to you, Scott, and in time you released the Scott Adams Grand Adventures games as shareware. Many are now playable in a Windows format, as downloads from your website, and the original 8-bit formats are very collectable, especially the early disk-based games. Out of all your legendary text adventure games, which one are you most proud of, and why?

S.A. The copyrights for the old games are in limbo. Most of the versions you see of them on the web are all fan conversions. My favourite of my classic games, including Marvel, would be *Fantastic Four* where you have to play two different characters. Of my non-Marvel series, I think my favourite was *Pirate Adventure* followed by *Ghost Town*.

S.W. You've had a massive influence on computer based adventure gaming, and basically started the whole commercial adventure game genre, beginning from hand-made, bagged cassettes and photocopied documentation in your home and peaking with a wide range of glossy, boxed commercial products and a company that dealt in a world market, finally leaving behind a legend and many fond memories for gamers. What does all that time and legacy mean to you?

S.A. I have found out that my classic games seem to have touched a lot of lives in a really positive way. I have received thousands of fan letters telling me about what they meant to folks back then. I am extremely happy that what I did was able to do good in so many lives. I am currently working on a new title based on a very major intellectual property. I am hoping this game will also be as meaningful to folks today.

S.W. Since you left the computer games industry, for many years you worked as a programmer for other, non-games companies. You also moved home

The Clopas team at GDC, March 2018; left to right: Alyssa McGaw, Roxanne Adams, Scott Adams, David Ababio, Jacob Klein, Jeremy Rako and April Way

from Miami, Florida to Platteville, Wisconsin. This must have been quite an upheaval? And of course, despite beginning from an Orthodox Jewish background, since those early days you've developed a profound Christian faith that has also changed your life, and that of your second wife and close partner, Roxanne. As a result, you also, as a personal product, developed a Bible-based adventure game, *The Inheritance*, which I assume was at least, in part, a product of that faith?

S.A. Yes, that's true. *The Inheritance* is not a preachy or evangelical game, it simply uses a bible for puzzles in the game. It is designed to get people to open a bible and read for themselves what it says. We have removed the game from the market currently as we plan to rewrite it and bring it up to 21st century standards. It will be similar to the game we are currently creating, *Escape the Gloomer*, which is based on *Mossflower**.

S.W. On that last point, big news is that over the past year or two, your working life has undergone something of a reboot, bringing you right back into the world of adventures, which will be music to the ears of your many fans. Your latest venture is Clopas, a new family-friendly development company which you've formed to work with Soma Games on a new series of modern adventure games based on the popular Redwall books. The whole Redwall concept, including the first part, the amazing-looking *Escape the Gloomer*, is quite a leap ahead compared with your past work, especially as you're working with a young team who must be in awe of you as pretty much the creator of the adventure gaming market. Can you tell me a little about Clopas and your latest venture?

S.A. Clopas LLC was founded in August 2017 by my wife Roxanne and I. We currently have eight employees and we're all working very hard on the game! I am actively involved in both the creative design and implementation of the game. But it is truly a team effort as we have a very creative group working on this. Roxanne is company Chief Operating Officer and is very actively involved too in the daily running of the company. She has also helped on the creative side as well, so the game can better meet the needs of the non-gamer community who just want to have fun in the Redwall universe.

We spent many, many months of iterative design/code/test and have modified the game tremendously from things we have discovered. We demoed a single chapter of the seven-chapter game at the Game Developers Conference in March 2018 and got a lot of good metrics. The game now is receiving a big thumbs-up from players, both puzzle players and non-gamers alike are enjoying it.

The meeting with Soma and the formation of Clopas LLC, I believe, are all God-driven. It was amazing how doors opened, and things came together that were completely outside our control. I give Him all credit for what we are doing and accomplishing.

We will have the game out in time for Christmas this year. There is also a possibility folks will get to experience the game earlier, with special early access on Steam! As with any early access, of course, that means it won't be as fully polished as the final game. We are planning to be out on a wide range of platforms, but it is still not final on which ones.

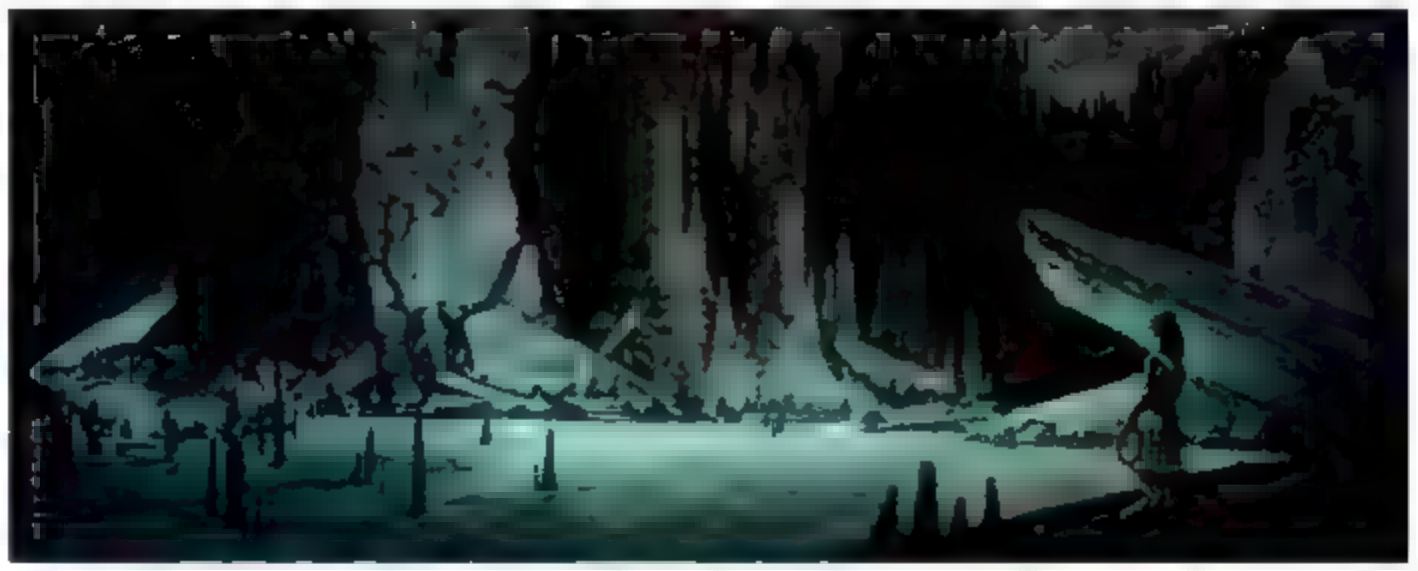
S.W. To conclude, and this might be a slightly controversial question to some – do you see classic text adventure games as 'interactive fiction', or 'just' adventure games? Infocom of course coined the former term, and other games companies used it to describe their product subsequently. Today, some independent or amateur developers of a literary bent have taken the term interactive fiction to describe something which is more of a multi-choice, interactive digital book than any of the older, more puzzle-based games. Some even see IF as a separate art form altogether, divorced from games. Yet, it seems to me, all these games ultimately exist to tell a story, and to give the player a role in that – making them, in fact, interactive fiction, albeit perhaps at a simpler level. What do you think?

S.A. That is something we wrestled with here at Clopas for some time. We have come up with a name that we think fits what we are currently doing since it is neither IF nor adventure gaming. We call *Escape the Gloomer* a Conversational Adventure™ game. It is a cross between IF and pure puzzle text adventures. We are finding that folks are really enjoying this new genre as we are creating it.

S.W. Thank you again Scott Adams, for answering these questions. It's been a privilege being able to interview you. Needless to say, I've been a fan of your work for a VERY long time, and I plan to renew that fandom via your new games, and hopefully many more to come. Good luck for the future – after all, not all those who wander are lost, and the adventure never ends!

S.A. My pleasure to help Stuart! I enjoyed doing this interview, as you have touched on some subjects and areas that no other interviewer has asked in the past.

Further information on Scott Adams' current work can be found on the Clopas Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/ClopasLLC/



* Second in the 'Redwall' series of children's fantasy fiction novels by Brian Jacques

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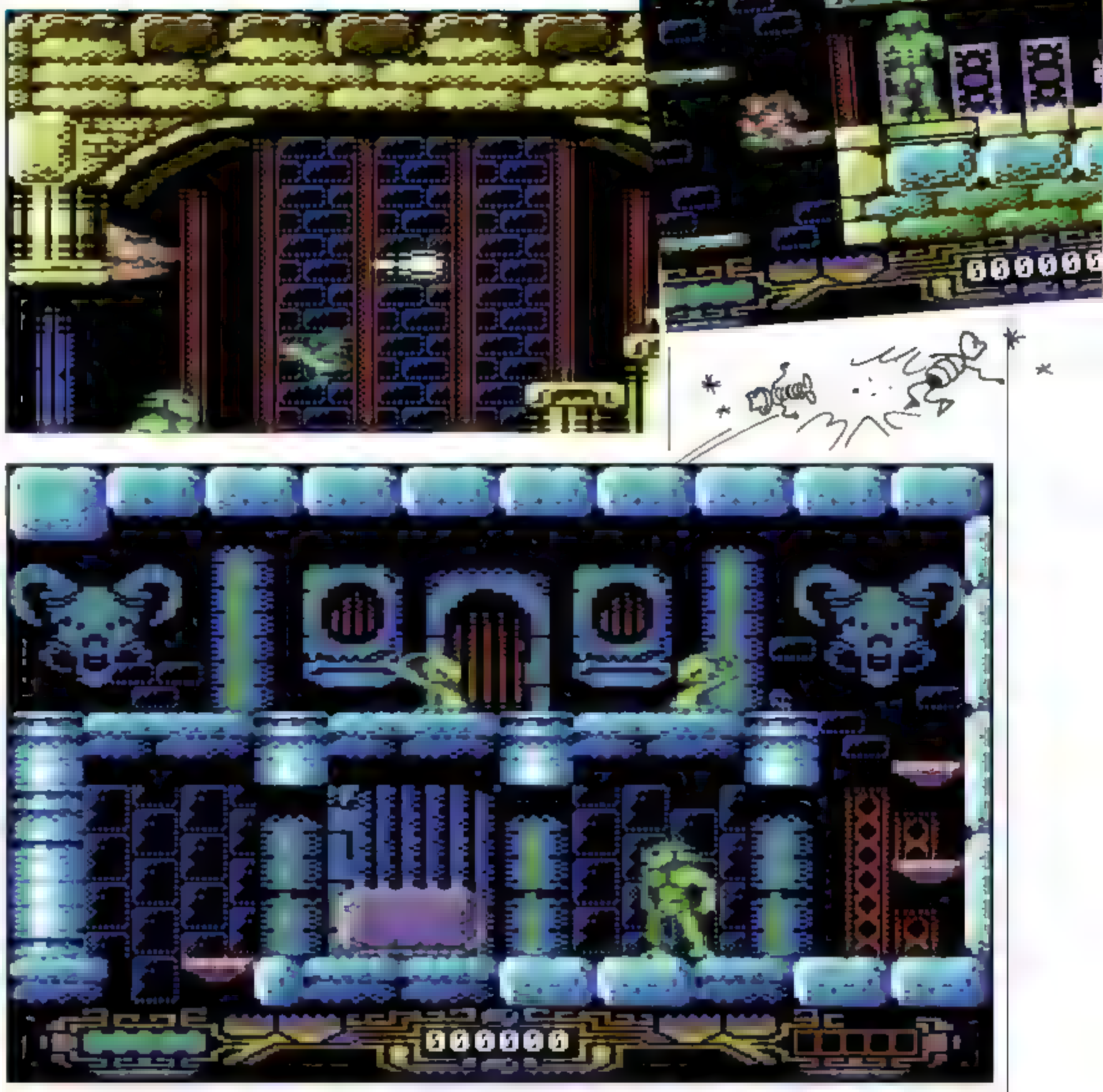
SOULLESS

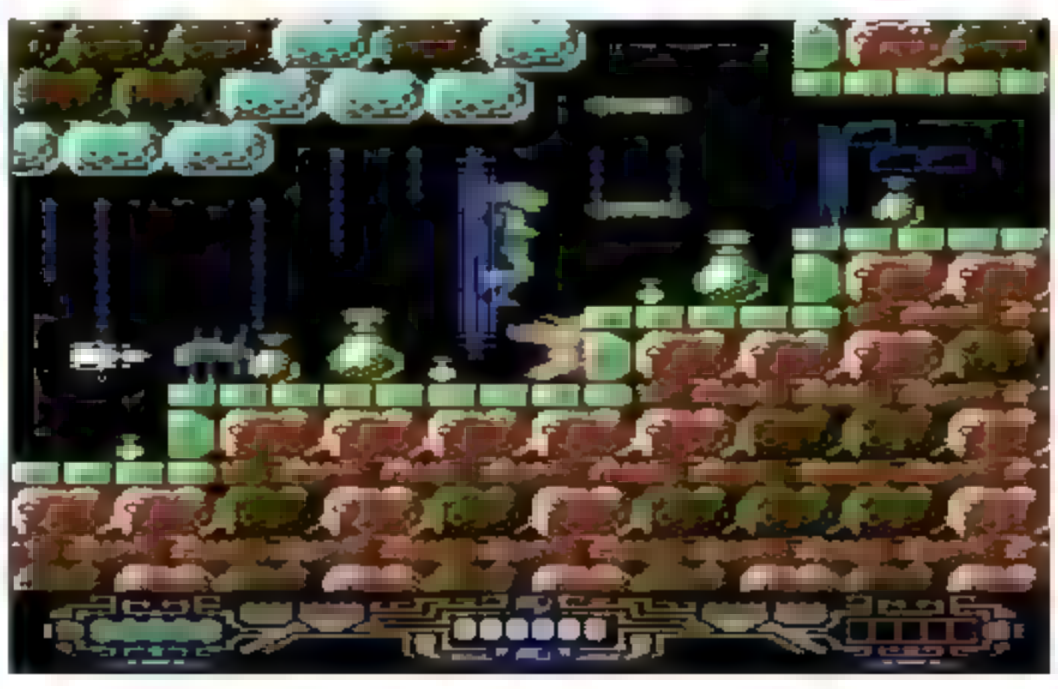
Psytronik/Georg Rottensteiner — 2017



Growing tired of war, powerful warrior king Rizek looks to restore peace in the land, a move that goes down badly with those around him who crave war. In particular an evil wizard who curses Rizek, removing his soul and turning him into a beast. After spending 1,000 years in a prison, an earthquake splits open the prison wall, and the beast is freed to search for his soul and restore peace to the land once more.

To achieve this, 12 spirit stones randomly scattered across a temple must be located and taken to the 'soul' room, there to be sorted into an order that will restore Rizek's soul and his human form. Hints on the nature of the order litter the temple: note them well because the game cannot be completed without this information.

A search of some rooms reveals magic potions which stun, slow down or clear a screen of dangerous creatures. Collect other objects such as health potions or rubies and gold that add points to the score. There are a number of re-spawn points within the game – activation is simply made by crouching on one of them. If you die, you re-spawn at the last re-spawn point – much better than going all the way back to the beginning of the game. As an added bonus, the re-spawn point also recharges Rizek's health.



My first thought on playing Soulless *was that it was like Zeppelin's old budget classic,* Draconus. *Imagine my surprise when it turned into kind of a mystic version of* Impossible Mission. *Despite being completely different cosmetically, the similarities are obvious once you get stuck in. Pushing up to search objects, finding items to disable the room's inhabitants or collecting puzzle pieces (spirit stones) which you must arrange in the correct order to complete the game are all hallmarks of the Epyx classic. That it cribs from one of the best and does everything well means that* Soulless *is a lot of fun to play. It's not quite on the same level – the controls are not as precise and some gameplay aspects niggle. These minor flaws aside,* Soulless *is a thoroughly enjoyable romp*

Influenced by Draconus *and* Impossible Mission *before it,* Soulless *is a handsome looking platform adventure that at first plays an impressive intro to set the scene. Looking and sounding beautiful, this is a simple search-and-collect type of game. For ten or so minutes of play I searched for my first weapon because the need to shoot something was strong! The realisation that I was not going to have that itch scratched was a tad disappointing, but to be fair,* Soulless *is not that type of game.*

THE BEAR ESSENTIALS

Pond Software/Graham Axten — 2016

Visually and aurally Soulless *is a gorgeous experience, and early progression requires careful consideration (and the occasional desire to shoot back!) Where it lacks is in guile – there are few surprises regarding enemy movement patterns and some frustration from the dissipation of magic on every screen. The jump mechanics are also a little clunky. On the plus side, some of the level design is cunning, there is a significant challenge present, and the periodic save points reduce the frustration of dying. Overall,* Soulless *attempts to match Dennis Caswell's masterpiece but ultimately comes up short. Sometimes the old classics cannot be bettered.*

PRESENTATION 4%

GRAPHICS 81%

SOUND 80%

HOOKABILITY 85%

LASTABILITY 78%

OVERALL 79%

Bear Essentials plays like a love letter to the glorious school summer holidays of the 1980s – a homage to days gone-by; of sun dappled strolls in the woods, hazy days spent laying in cornfields listening to birdsong, river walks and beach side BBQs – all ignored in favour of sitting indoors with the curtains pulled, hunched over a C64!

Bear's wife (with stampy foot and pointy finger, clearly a furry reimagining of Miner Willy's housekeeper Maria) has serious concerns about the forthcoming winter. Their cupboard supplies are dangerously low, and unless stocks are replenished swiftly it'll be game over before the game has actually started. So, she sends Bear out on a quest – to collect apples from the numerous beautiful yet dangerous nearby locales to hoard in their store in readiness for the Bear family's hibernation. Begrudgingly (and suspecting that his wife actually plans to make homebrew cider instead) Bear sets off on an adventure across 60 screens of platforming action while avoiding numerous flora and fauna all keen to put a stop to his nefarious scrumping activities.

While Barnsley Badger *is in the vein of* Monty on the Run, The Bear Essentials *owes more to* Creatures *and* Jet Set Willy, *and the gameplay certainly apes our favourite miner, with Bear having to collect every single apple before Mrs Bear will allow him back home. This large, difficult task means seeing the Game Over screen a lot! In the main, it's enjoyable although the collision detection is occasionally overly precise, leading to slightly unnecessary frustration. It's by no means a game-breaker, but something to bear* [Hah! —ED] *in mind. Of the two, I slightly prefer this to* Barnsley Badger *but it all comes down to personal preference and this is a good bit of fun.*

Bear Essentials *was conceived as a pet project to combine* Jet Set Willy *and* Creatures, *with the resulting fusion certainly hitting both objectives with aplomb. There are more than a few passing nods to Matthew Smith's seminal classic, from the initial premise of having to collect all those apples; the cunning and evil connecting paths between certain screens; even the impatient, finger-pointing nature of Mrs Bear! The graphics have all the charm, character and personality that the Rowland brothers put into their titles. At heart the game is a collectathon that perhaps outstays its welcome due to the sheer number of items you need to acquire. Available checkpoints and passwords mean the game doesn't have to be completed in a sitting, though, which certainly prolongs interest.*

Despite being chock full of references, nods and sly winks to classic platform games, Bear Essentials *manages to create its own unique character and a freshness in spite of its obvious roots and inspirations. And like those famous predecessors it also faces the player with a stiff challenge. The game's presentation is quite superb throughout and although you can download it for free from Pond's website, the beautiful physical package is a must have. It expands the game to include extra rooms, a VERY handy map system and more. The game has a cracking sense of humour, and is imbued with a wonderful sense of character throughout and (without wanting to give too much away) the last area of the game is wonderfully realised and will undoubtedly bring a massive smile to the face of any hardy gamers who manage to reach it.*

PRESENTATION 80%
A humorous title screen sets the scene; a passcode system encourages prolonged play.

GRAPHICS 84%
Solid, bright, cute and colourful, although the animation is slightly limited.

SOUND 79%
Cute, bouncy soundtrack which suits the action perfectly.

HOOKABILITY 83%
The simplicity makes Bear instantly appealing to play.

LASTABILITY 68%
Occasionally frustrating, but Bear's family needs to be fed!

OVERALL 77%
Not quite essential, but a very worthy effort for platform fans.

STEEL RANGER

Psytronik — 2018

The busy interactive intro sets the scene for the challenge ahead. It's 2218 and as humanity travels across the galaxy a war ensues against a machine intelligence. When a binary transmission forming an Omega symbol is detected, a patrol vessel is sent to the transmitting planet to investigate what it all means. Does the symbol represent an advantage for mankind or is it a deadly trap?

The ship's crew is equipped with 'Ranger' armour suits, designed to protect them in combat against the foe. The task of investigating this hostile world falls to the crew's latest member . . . you!

Steel Ranger is an exploratory 2D run 'n' gun platform game – very much in the guise of *Turrican* – in which you need to find the source of the Omega symbol, traversing a graphically rich scrolling world. The place crawls with creatures of land and air, machines and gun emplacements . . . and big, bad bosses. Parts of the map are blocked off and can only be opened by obtaining passes and switching off the computer systems controlling access to these areas.

Those enemies you have despatched are very thoughtful – they leave parts of themselves behind and these may be used to upgrade weapons, Ranger armour and replenish firepower.

*All praise to the musical score – arguably the best part of the game – which changes as you progress. So: great graphics — **check**, awesome sound — **check**, imaginative story line — **check**; great controls . . . ermm, **no**. Sadly, controlling commander Archer Hess is a chore as you try to jump and move around the terrain: Jump and aiming the gun to shoot aliens flying above share the same joystick control, and the ranger's action depends on how close he is to something to jump onto or over. This is a great looking and sounding game let down by frustrating controls.*

Here we go again, with another wild ride from the creator of Hessian *and the* Metal Warrior *series. This one follows the same formula as* Hessian *. . . something bad happens as you're talking to other characters, leaving you to strike out on your own and save the day.* Steel Ranger *actually feels like a cross between* Hessian *and* Turrican, *so you know you're in for another treat. The control method has been refined over Lasse Öörni's earlier games, making it easier to play and less frustrating. Battling through another sci-fi epic is gripping stuff, but it's starting to feel a little too familiar. It is a quality game, and if you liked Hessian you should definitely get this, but I'm hoping for something just as good but from a fresh perspective next time.*

STEEL RANGER

Comparisons to Hessian are inevitable, given their fundamental similarities. The run 'n' gun action takes time to adjust to in the revised control mechanics, especially how stairs are handled. No weapon reloads either. There are more than a few nods to Turrican, mostly in the weapon and upgrade department, albeit one of them is utilised smartly as part of the map design, some definite sniffing of Metroid spirit there. I was also grateful not having to remember key codes as all access is done via earned cards instead. Different endings too, albeit not quite as radical or varying. All in all, Steel Ranger delivers a faster-paced experience, more blasting, more hidden areas, less micro-management, although I did miss some of the puzzles. If you loved Hessian, you're certainly going to love this, although as a result it doesn't feel quite as original.

PRESENTATION 94%

GRAPHICS 85%

Very good sprites and backgrounds, can be a bit samey.

SOUND 90%

Excellent tunes and appropriate, if familiar FX.

HOOKABILITY 88%

LASTABILITY 90%

A massive challenge with more than one ending to aim for means you'll be at it for ages.

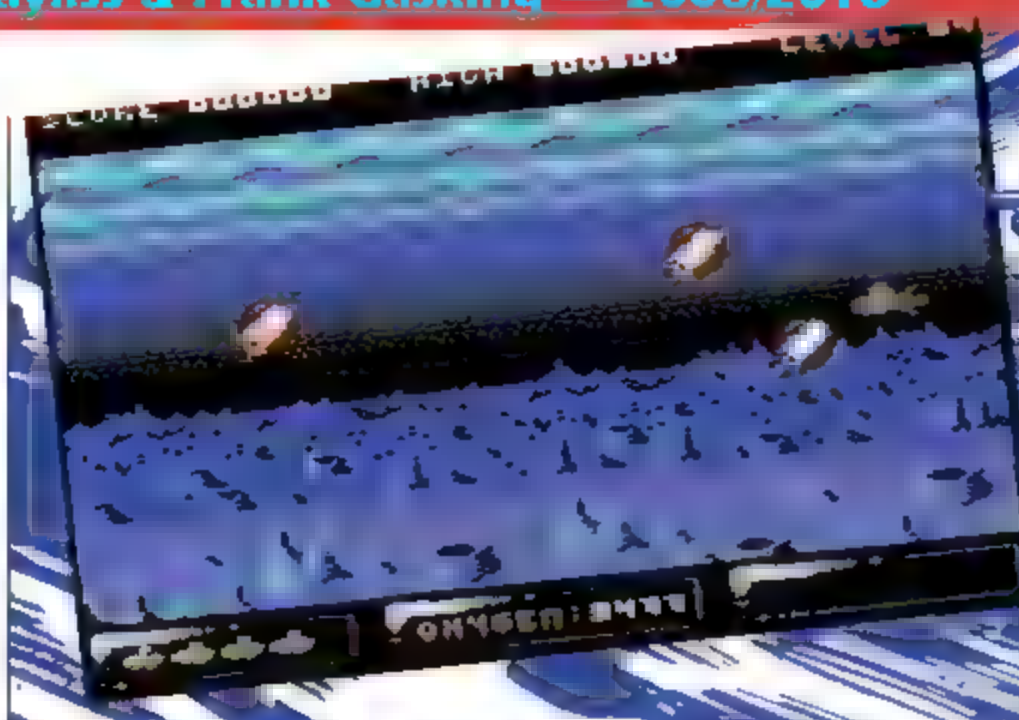
OVERALL 90%

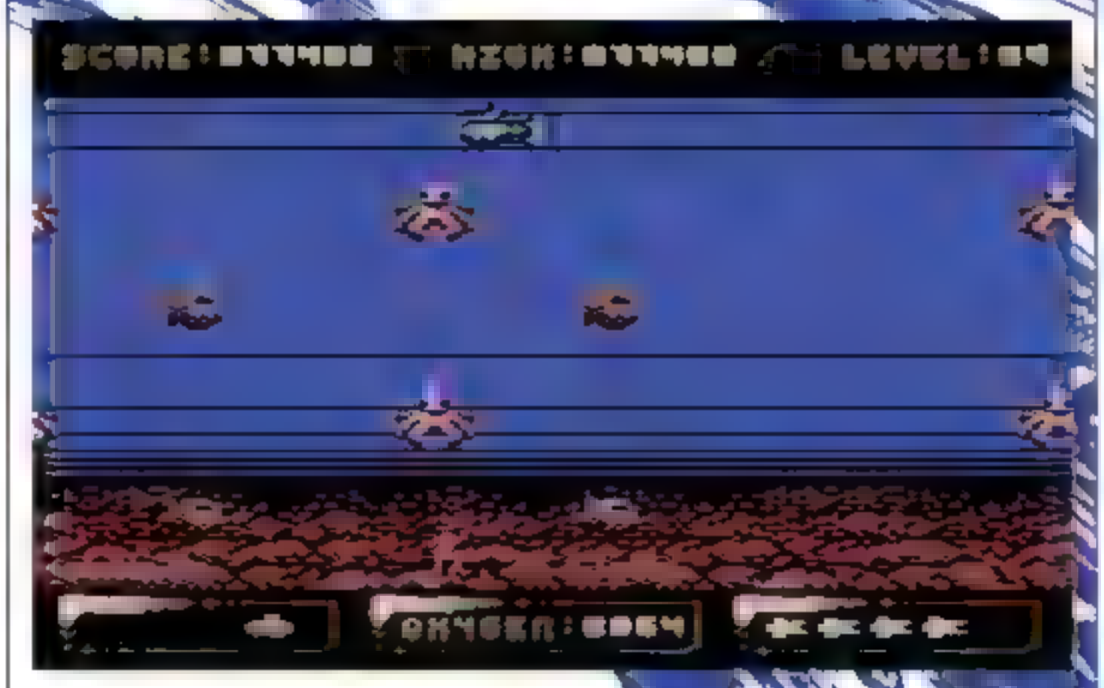
A superb game, which only to its predecessor.

TEST

SUB HUNTER

Psytronik/Richard Bayliss & Frank Gasking — 2008/2016





The Government (note the capital G) is trying to cover up an experiment gone wrong that's ended up with toxic waste dumped into the sea. So what's new? And guess what? The fish have mutated into ravening giants. Worse, a bunch of demented swimmers has been lost while far out in the briny wastes . . . what, you might well ask, are they doing miles from anywhere, floundering about in the waves, but there you go, it's your task to rescue the loonies

Clear a path through the predatory sea life, take out any Government guardian subs (all part of the Government cock up cover up), find the swimmers and save them. But keep a wary eye on the sub's oxygen level, or lose a life. Four levels require the rescue of divers trapped on the seabed, three pit you against wild shark attacks, and to complete the game there's a mutant shark to best. It's bubbles all the way. For the truly intrepid submariner, a bonus level offers the reward of diamonds . . . but make sure to avoid the bouncing mines

For all its gloss and shine, at heart Sub Hunter *is a collection of simple mini-games, which to their credit combine to make the whole a very addictive affair – a good challenge and, the thing I like most, a pace that encourages one more go. Accompanying the sub action is a lovely set of tunes and gorgeous graphics, in particular the parallax effects and the cute enemies (I thought I recognised those jellyfish). I would have liked more variety in the enemies per level and I found the sound FX somewhat limited but nothing to detract from the overall pleasure. Presentation is top notch, with a lovely loading screen, nice little story and a bouncy title screen. While the variety of mini games are a nice touch, I'm not sure* Sub Hunter *has lasting appeal given the lack of depth (ahem), but it is jolly, beautifully presented and plain old fashioned simple fun.*

First impressions are of a reverse side-scrolling shooter, one with parallax scrolling à la Nebulus, *and gameplay to match. However, the balanced homogenisation of several game types, including* Sea Wolf *and* Lunar Rescue, *really took me back. This allows the game to remain fresh, no particular sub-stage (hah hah) outstays its welcome. Time limits and overall challenge are fair and reasonable, with nothing unduly heckle inducing. The parallax is very well done, and the overall graphics and sound equally impressive. It would have been nice to use the remaining oxygen as a bonus score to encourage faster play, but that is a minor blemish.* Sub Hunter *is fun, varied and addictive to play, with a desire to get further along and achieve higher scores.*

Taking clear inspiration from a number of classic games, including Depthcharge, In The Hunt *and the bonus section from* Nebulus, Sub Hunter *melds all these and more into one cohesive game. In fact, it's this variety that kept me coming back when more predictable games would have lost my attention. You're never sure of what's coming next, which results in a constantly enjoyable and challenging experience. Could there be improvements? Sure; it would be nice if you could pick up more powerful weaponry as you progress, and any oxygen remaining when you complete a level should be added as a score bonus. But these are nitpicks. I really,* really *like* Sub Hunter *— recommended to any shmup fan.*

PRESENTATION 88%
Packed with options, comprehensive look at the history and a fun two player

GRAPHICS 85%
Small but beautiful sprites, impressive parallax scrolling and a

SOUND 79%
Some good Maniacs of Noise proceedings

HOOKABILITY 92%
Several stranded swimmers to surprisingly speedy

LASTABILITY 78%
Several different stage types keep things fresh and it's always fun to try for a new high score

OVERALL 81%
A very enjoyable take on the shoot 'em up, which comes highly recommended

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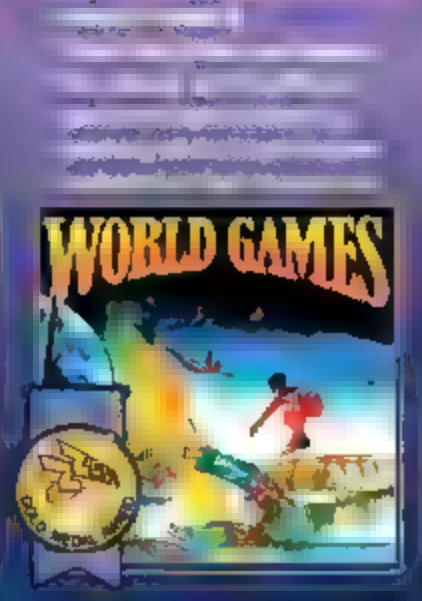

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BACK with Jaz Rignall

In this nostalgia-ridden retrospective, Julian 'Jaz' Rignall digs the first 20 issues of ZZAP! 64 out of his closet and casts a beady eye over all the Gold Medal reviews of the era. Just how many of these top-awarded games deserved their astronomical ratings, or were the ZZAP!64 crew simply caught up in their hype? Jaz reminisces about what the team thought at the time, and delivers his modern-day verdict with the benefit of decades of hindsight.

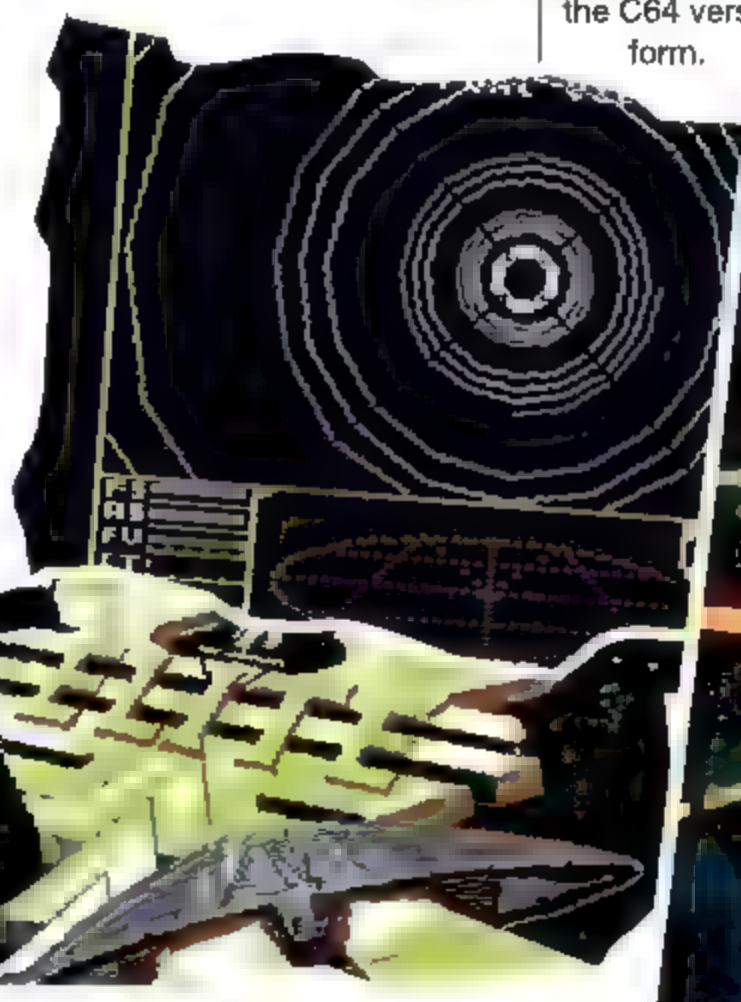
Elite

Publisher: Firebird
Reviewed: Issue 1
Overall Score: 95%

ZZAP! 64 hadn't even launched yet, and it was already embroiled in an inter-team controversy. *Elite* was brought to ZZAP! Towers for review before Gary Penn and I joined the magazine, so it was left up to Bob Wade to rate the game on his own—which very much went against ZZAP!'s three-reviewer philosophy. Turns out he absolutely loved the C64 version of the BBC computer space trading title, calling it a 'mega-game' and bestowing on it the very first Gold Medal award.

However, when Penn and I saw the finished game a few months later, we weren't so impressed. Sure, it's an amazing concept and an astonishing programming achievement, but we felt that the game's slow, flickering graphics made it a little frustrating to play – especially when it came to docking with space stations and dogfighting enemy spaceships. As a result, we both considered it was more deserving of a near-Sizzler rating, rather than a Gold Medal. Oh, the humanity!

These days, there's no denying that *Elite* is a seminal game with tremendous historical significance. But let's face it. Decent though it may have been, the C64 version isn't its finest form.



Theatre Europe

Publisher: PSS
Reviewed: Issue 2
Overall Score: 94%

Inspiring what was surely one of ZZAP!'s grimmest and goriest covers – a close-up of a soldier in a full chemical suit whose face was being melted by a nuclear detonation – *Theatre Europe* is a strategy war game whose premise is centered on the escalation of conflict between NATO and the Eastern Bloc, and the subsequent threat of mutually assured destruction.

At the core of *Theatre Europe*'s appeal is its accessibility. Unlike many war games of the mid-1980s, its presentation and design make it easy to pick up and play. Couple that with its intriguing and thought provoking subject matter, and it's easy to see why the ZZAP! team was so taken with the game. 'This triumph of gaming and common sense should prove the most popular war game yet,' opined Bob Wade, while Gary Penn felt, 'The atmosphere generated by this excellent game is unrivalled by anything else available on the Commodore 64.'

Although *Theatre Europe*'s intermission screens and in-game graphics feel pretty crude nowadays, it still retains much of its tension and atmosphere as you attempt to wage war without resorting to the nuclear option. It ultimately represents a fascinating snapshot of the Cold War era, and if you've never played it before, it's well worth a whirl.

Dropzone

Publisher: US Gold
Reviewed: Issue 3
Overall Score: 95%

As an ardent *Defender* fan, I just couldn't believe my eyes when Archer McLean brought this exceptional piece of software to ZZAP! Towers in the early summer of 1985. Clearly inspired by Eugene Jarvis' classic horizontally scrolling shooter, *Dropzone* delivered silky smooth, super-fast arcade action of a quality that was unparalleled at the time.

I was certainly in seventh heaven. I remember grabbing a trusty Kempston Competition Pro and blasting away with a real sense of awe: the graphics were

outstanding and the gameplay was absolutely superb. *Dropzone* was basically an arcade-quality game for the world's most popular home micro, and we all raved about it accordingly. 'Simply a dream come true,' said I, while Gary enthused, 'The combination of fast action, excellent controls, brilliant inertial effects, and alien variety make this a compulsive and exhilarating masterpiece.'

I still love the game today. Indeed, if you ask me to name my all-time favourite Commodore 64 games, *Dropzone* will inevitably make the Top 5. It's a truly timeless piece of software that hasn't lost any of its original appeal. Brilliant, brilliant stuff!

Entombed

Publisher: Ultimate Play the Game
Reviewed: Issue 3
Overall Score: 93%

Man, did we love Ultimate Play the Game's *Entombed* back in the day. I remember playing it tag-team with Gary Penn morning, noon and night, charting our progress using pen and paper as we navigated through the game's expansive environment. Oli Frey then took our crude drawings and turned them into the exceptional double-page map that accompanied our review of the game.

It was very much a labour of love. Although it's very challenging – something that's true of most games of the era – we found *Entombed*'s puzzles thoroughly addictive and fun to tackle. Definitely a step up from the rather frustrating and obscure ones that featured in the prior game in the series, *Staff of Karnath*.

Gary offered our only criticism of the game, noting that he felt, 'Somewhat disappointed and cheated by the anticlimactic ending,' but still thought it was, 'Brilliant.'

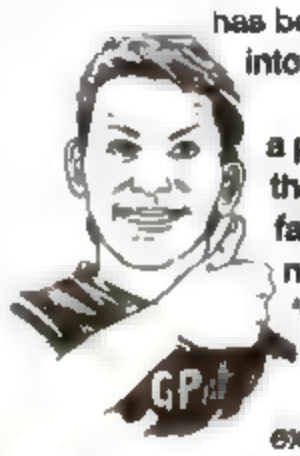
However, in the cold light of the modern era, *Entombed* has aged badly. Even though it's Ultimate's best effort on the Commodore 64, its graphics look really gaudy and blocky, and trudging Sir Arthur Pendragon around the hazard-packed map just doesn't feel quite as entertaining and rewarding as it did the first time around.

'Wow! Great! Amazing! Incredible!' ejaculated Bob Wade. I boasted, 'Oooooh I'm knackered. I played this game for 16 hours yesterday, stopping only for food, nicotine, and the kind of coffee that strips paint.'

The Fourth Protocol

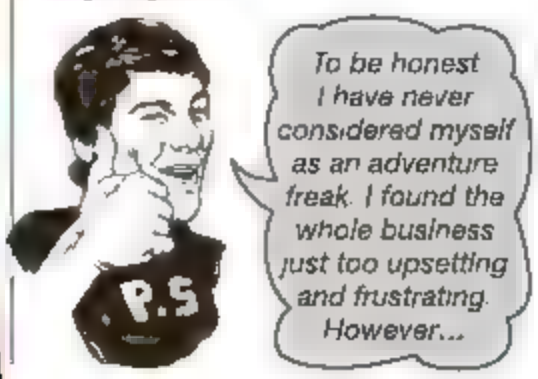
Publisher: Hutchinson Computer Publishing
Reviewed: Issue 4
Overall Score: 95%

Now this is a really interesting piece of software – one that I think was very innovative and advanced for the time. It's a three-part adventure based on the Frederick Forsyth novel, but don't let the A-word put you off. What makes it interesting is that it largely eschews the traditional text input of similar games of the period, and instead uses icons to enable the player to control the action. Well, I say action, but this rather sedate and cerebral game doesn't actually have much of it. It's more of a tense spy thriller that involves solving puzzles, assigning agents to follow leads, and combing through their reports for clues that will enable you to uncover a nefarious plot involving a nuclear weapon that has been smuggled into the UK.



'This is such a polished game that words fail,' said Gary, noting that, 'Only playing it can adequately express how effective it is.' I likened the game to a, 'Thinking man's *Shadowfire*,' and went on to say that, 'I think the best thing to say about this game is BUY IT.'

However, despite our stellar review, my assumption is that very few *ZZAP!* readers went out and bought this at the time. The screenshots just didn't look particularly exciting, and the way we described the game made it sound complex and difficult to fathom. A shame, as *The Fourth Protocol* is a really cleverly designed adventure that has a lot going for it.



Frankie Goes to Hollywood

Publisher: Ocean
Reviewed: Issue 5
Overall Score: 97%

Created by Denton Designs and published by Ocean, this extremely offbeat and much hyped at the time game-of-the-pop-group actually comprises ten different mini-games, some of which are really bizarre, quite surreal, and very, very challenging. But despite the strange and somewhat obscure nature of the gameplay, the ZZAP! team absolutely loved *Frankie Goes to Hollywood*, although some of us had difficulty putting our fingers on exactly what it was about the game that made it so addictive. 'I dunno quite what it is – there's just something about *Frankie* that makes you just want to keep playing and playing and playing . . . Relax! I can't explain it,' quipped Gary Penn.

What was clear, however, was that it's an audio-visual tour-de-force. Packing some excellent renditions of Frankie Goes to Hollywood's most memorable tunes and featuring very nicely detailed graphics, we all raved over the sheer quality of the game's looks and sound 'Truly marvelous, with plenty of attention to detail' said Paul Sumner of the former, while I called the latter, 'Superb.'

Its sky-high difficulty and overall weirdness notwithstanding, I still think *Frankie Goes to Hollywood* is a tremendous title Its out-of-the-box design and creative gameplay make it a really special game. It might occasionally have you scratching your head in bewilderment, as well as chucking the joystick in frustration, but it nevertheless deserves to be played

Summer Games II

Publisher: US Gold, Epyx
Reviewed: Issue 5
Overall Score: 97%

Packing eight different events that vary from equestrian through fencing to cycling, we were unanimous in our verdict that *Summer Games II* was the best sports simulation yet seen on any home computer system. I remember us all playing it incessantly, constantly trash-talking to one another as we tried to beat each others' records.

'The greatest thing to ever grace a diskette,' said Gary Penn, before going on to note, 'The superb combination of outstanding graphics, wonderful sounds, and enthralling and addictive gameplay put *Summer Games II* in a class of its own.' When it was my turn to deliver an opinion, I complained, 'After Gary's comment, there's nothing much to say – he seems to have swiped all the superlatives in the Complete Oxford Dictionary.' I went on to state, 'This piece of software reaches the very pinnacle of Commodore 64 programming to date.'

I still think *Summer Games II* is a brilliant title on a number of levels. Each event feels unique and interesting in its own right, with high-quality gameplay that varies wildly from sport to sport. Graphically, it's absolutely superb, featuring the kind of top-notch animation that Epyx was renown for. Even the sound is still absolutely spot-on.

Summer Games II is definitely one of the all-time classic sports titles I love all of Epyx' sports games – but this one is something special.

Little Computer People Discovery Kit

Publisher: Activision
Reviewed: Issue 7
Overall Score: 97%

David Crane has produced some really innovative games over the years, but I think the *Little Computer People Discovery Kit* is one of his crowning achievements. Very much a progenitor of *The Sims*, it's a delightful bit of programming brilliance that enables your very own randomly generated pet person to live inside your Commodore 64.

Primary reviewing honours fell to Gary, who logged his experiences with Adam, his little computer person, in the form of a diary While Gary initially looked after Adam, he ended up not feeding him for days to see what would happen. I remember watching with dismay as the little computer person turned a sickly green, and one day when Gary turned on his Commodore 64 to check in on him, he was dead! We all gave Gary some serious stick for killing Adam, but at the same time we thought it was pretty funny. It certainly made for

an entertaining conclusion to his review.

If you've never played *Little Computer People* before, I highly recommend giving it a go. It's a truly timeless piece of software that's as fresh and interesting today as it was back in September of 1985. Sure, the interactions feel a little limited compared to modern-era games like *The Sims*, but it has an 8-bit charm all of its own that makes it thoroughly endearing. Just ensure you don't play the ultra-limited cassette version. The disk version has so much more going for it.

Paradroid

Publisher: Hewson Consultants
Reviewed: Issue 7
Overall Score: 97%

After months of being the subject of *ZZAP!*'s Diary of a Game feature, *Paradroid* arrived at ZZAP! Towers on a wave of hype. We'd all loved Andrew Braybook's previous game, *Gribbly's Day Out*, and had very high hopes for his new robot combat game.

Turns out it was an absolute winner. Very much a thinking man's shooter, *Paradroid* features tense and thrilling gameplay in which the player enters a series of dreadnaught spaceships and attempts to destroy the army of renegade robots that reside therein – either by shooting them to smithereens, or taking them over via a pulse-pounding mini-game.

We all waxed hyperbolic about the game's excellent controls, outstanding bas-relief graphics, stunning atmosphere, and its fantastic design, and concluded that it was THE classic shoot 'em up. '*Gribbly's* was great, but *Paradroid* . . . For once words fail me,' said Gary Penn. I simply stated, '*Paradroid* is one of the best programs I've seen on the Commodore 64.'

High praise indeed, but looking back, I don't think we were wrong. *Paradroid* is often cited by retro-enthusiasts as being one of the all-time 8-bit greats, and deservedly so. It's an absolutely fabulous game that's lost none of its original appeal.

If you're reading this fine tome, I feel that it's pretty much a dead cert that you've played this game already. But in the incredibly slim off-chance that you haven't, do yourself a favour and play it at the next available opportunity. If you don't, you're missing out on one of the very finest Commodore 64 games.

Ballblazer

Publisher: Activision/Lucasfilm Games
Reviewed: Issue 9
Overall Score: 98%

Although *Ballblazer* was labeled a Sizzler when we reviewed it in the 1985 ZZAP! Christmas Special, it was actually supposed to be a Gold Medal game. The art department was to blame for that slight slip-up, which we duly corrected in the editorial of the following issue.

Regardless of the error, it was pretty clear that we absolutely loved *Ballblazer*. Indeed the two Garys, Penn and Liddon, both called Lucasfilm Games' one-on-one future sports simulation the, 'Best game of the year'. We noted that it takes some getting used to, but that once you're familiar with the way that the Rotofoil automatically snaps around to face the ball, the game becomes tremendous fun to play. Well, at least against human opponents. Because therein lay a significant rub for some readers.

Unfortunately, *Ballblazer*'s AI is flawed, and once you figure out its weakness, you can easily score against the computer time and time again. This was something that we failed to spot when we reviewed it because we spent all our time playing the game against one another, and not the computer opponent. As a consequence, we received quite a number of complaints from disappointed readers who'd bought the game and felt that we'd severely overrated it because they only played against the AI and found the game way too easy. Doh!

However, even though the computer opponent is critically flawed, I still think *Ballblazer* is a classic. Sure, we might have overrated it a bit, but played against a human opponent, it's an absolutely brilliant game whose legacy lives on today in the form of *Rocket League*.

'HAS KENNY EVERETT PUT A HEX ON ANDREW'S PROG?! WILL STEVE STOP THE CAT FROM EATING THE RULER? WILL THE PARANOID PARADROID LEARN TO SHAVE? THESE AND OTHER QUESTIONS WILL BE ANSWERED NEXT MONTH!!'

Bounder

Publisher: Gremlin Graphics
Reviewed: Issue 10
Overall Score: 97%

Gremlin Graphics' highly original overhead-viewed vertically scrolling platformer took ZZAP! Towers by storm when it arrived for review over the Christmas period of 1985. It involves taking control of a ball and bouncing from platform to platform high above the ground – while avoiding a myriad of hazards and denizens.

Gary Penn and I both thought the graphics wouldn't look out of place in an arcade game, while Gary Liddon called out the excellent parallax scrolling effect between the ground and the platforms that, 'Creates a great sense of depth.' And we all raved about just how maddeningly addictive the gameplay was. Indeed, I went so far to say that *Bounder*, 'Should come with a government health warning'".

Something that we didn't really touch on, however, was just how incredibly hard the game is. Back then, sky-high difficulty was often seen as a positive thing and most players welcomed a stiff challenge with open arms, but even so, *Bounder* is exceptionally difficult. Just bear that in mind if you're thinking of playing it again. It's fun, but you might want to find yourself a nice, soft pillow to scream into when you start dying **over and over and over again.**

The Eidolon

Publisher: Activision/Lucasfilm Games
Reviewed: Issue 10
Overall Score: 97%

Created by Lucasfilm Games and published by Activision, *The Eidolon* is a really intriguing high-concept game in which the player guides the eponymous Victorian-era craft into the depths of their very own minds. The journey involves navigating a series of fractally-generated caves, within which reside a variety of monsters that must be destroyed so that the player can continue to delve deeper into the recesses of their self-consciousness.

We'd loved all of Lucasfilm Games' previous releases – *Rescue on Fractalus*, *Ballblazer*, and *Koronis Rift* – and *The Eidolon* was no different. Superlatives were thrown around with gay abandon as Gary, Gary, and I gushed over the game. Penn felt that it was, 'Yet another classic from Lucasfilm', while Liddon called it, 'An astounding adventure.' He went on to say that there was, 'Nothing about it I can criticise.'

In this day and age of silky-smooth frame rates and cartoon-quality graphics, *The Eidolon* feels pretty slow and clunky. It's tricky to fathom if you don't have the instructions, and the gameplay feels somewhat anachronistic. Its 3D effects and large, animated monsters were certainly an astounding achievement for the time, but *The Eidolon* hasn't aged well, and just isn't as fun to play as I remember it.

Mercenary

Publisher: Novagen
Reviewed: Issue 11
Overall Score: 98%

Written by the late, great Paul Woakes, *Mercenary* is a groundbreaking 3D open-world game that utterly knocked our socks off when we received our long-awaited review copy in February of 1986.

'Seldom has a game kept everyone at *ZZAP!* glued to a monitor for so long,' quoth I, while Sean Masterson likened the game to *Elite*, but felt it, 'Introduced so many original elements that it has surpassed its successful predecessor in terms of excitement and playability.' I also compared *Mercenary* to *Elite*, and said that its superior vector graphics, 'Makes *Elite* seem like a BASIC program.' I concluded my comment with, '*Mercenary* is about the best computer game ever to be written.'

Strong stuff, but I think our hyperbolism was – and still is – richly deserved. *Mercenary* was years ahead of its time; a seminal piece of programming genius that showed the incredible potential of video games as an entertainment medium. While most releases of the era were quite simple, arcade-style products designed around the coin-drop paradigm, *Mercenary* presented the player with an expansive world to explore that was unlike anything we'd ever seen before.

Of course, *Mercenary*'s vector graphics seem quite simple today, but I'm still impressed by their speed and the depth of view that they convey. And I continue to be amazed at how Paul Woakes managed to squeeze this entire game into a Commodore 64. If you've never played it, I thoroughly recommend doing so. This is a piece of gaming history that really deserves to be experienced and appreciated.

Alter Ego

Publisher: Activision
Reviewed: Issue 13
Overall Score: 98%

In the month that ZZAP! officially became the biggest-selling Commodore 64 magazine in Europe, Activision's exceptionally ambitious *Alter Ego* was wowing the team. The disk only game is basically an icon-driven . . . hmm . . . well . . . I guess 'life simulation' is the best way to describe it. Starting from infancy and working through childhood, adulthood, middle age, and ultimately old age, you're presented with a variety of different decisions that impact your alter ego as you journey through an entire virtual life.

I remember booting the game up and losing an entire weekend playing it . . . and then taking my saved game into the office on Monday and continuing to play it there. I was absolutely hooked, and I wasn't the only one. Sean Masterson said, 'From the very first key press, this game is addictive—really addictive,' while Gary described *Alter Ego* as, 'One of the most addictive and compulsive games I've ever played.'

It's still just as compelling today as it was 32 years ago. While the game basically boils down to being an exceptionally sophisticated series of multiple-choice questions, they're so cleverly written and compiled that they make your virtual life utterly enthralling. You really do want to see just what will happen next to your character.

My guess is that very few ZZAP! readers bought and played this when it was first released because it's such an odd and unusual concept. Such a shame, as I think it's a brilliant, truly innovative and original program.

Spindizzy

Publisher: Electric Dreams
Reviewed: Issue 14
Overall Score: 98%

I spoke earlier about how the extremely high difficulty of games of yore was often seen as a positive thing, and our review of Electric Dreams' terrific flick screen forced 3D perspective arcade adventure very much exemplifies that. I noted that *Spindizzy* is, 'Incredibly challenging and can get very frustrating,' but, 'Due to the game's immense addictive qualities, you just have to keep on going back for more.' 'The game plays very fast indeed and offers a better than average challenge, even for the most aggressive of joystick mashers,' said Gary Liddon, while Gary Penn stated that, '*Spindizzy* is by no means easy, and will take ages to solve.'

There are two aspects of the game that make it so incredibly tough. The first is the fiendishly designed level layouts. Successfully guiding GERALD (a Gyroscopic Environmental Reconnaissance and Land-mapping Device) through the game's hundreds of screens requires pinpoint precision, and it's very easy to die by falling off the myriad of narrow pathways or through the many holes in the landscape. Then doubling down on that is a time limit that's tighter than a gnat's chuff. It leaves you with absolutely no room for error, and makes the game exceptionally unforgiving.

Spindizzy is certainly fun to play, but be prepared to control the urge to hurl your joystick across the room in frustration when you die. Because that will happen—repeatedly.

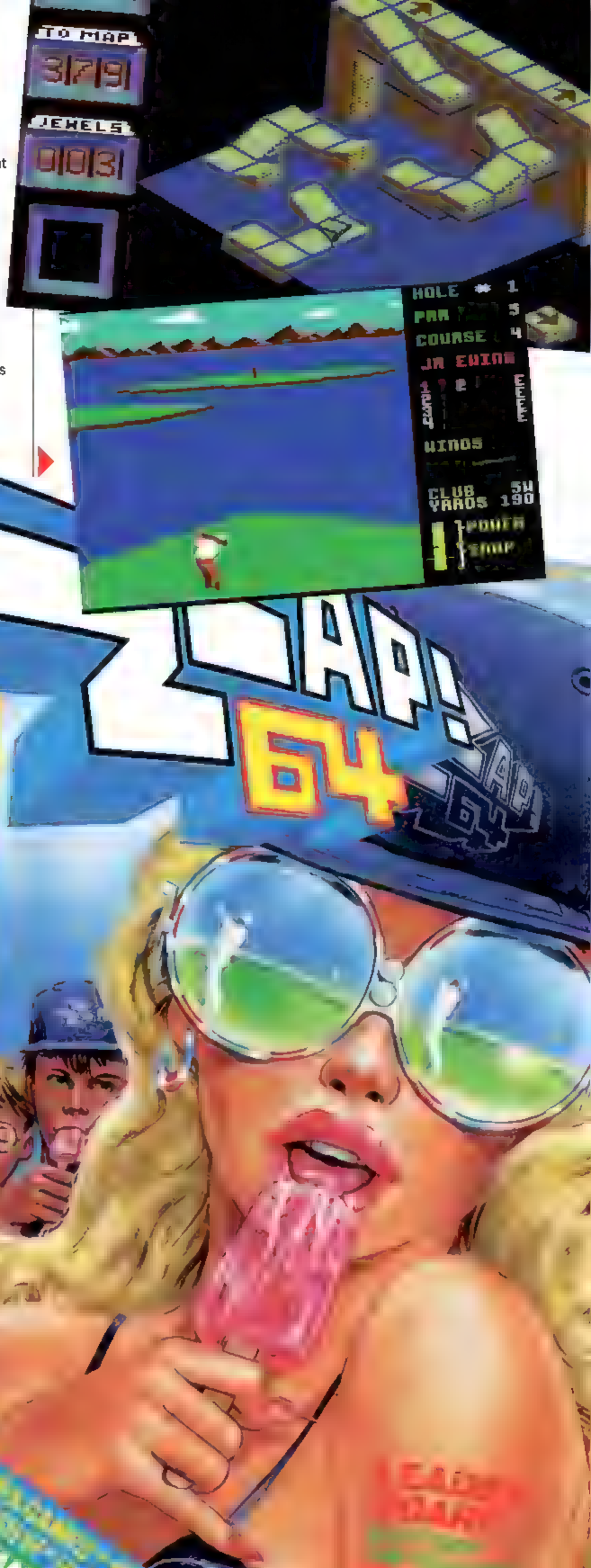
Leader Board

Publisher: US Gold/Access
Reviewed: Issue 15
Overall Score: 97%

When Access' *Leader Board* turned up at the ZZAP! offices in June of 1986, none of us expected it to be any good. Up until that point, Commodore 64 golf games had been largely moribund affairs that just hadn't captured our imagination. 'After suffering at the hands of Ariolasoft's *Golf Construction Set*, I wasn't looking forward to playing another golf simulation,' moaned Gary Penn, while I admitted that, 'I normally associate golf with boredom . . . and golf games with horror.'

But after playing it, our opinions magically reversed. 'I was more than pleasantly surprised by *Leader Board*. In fact, I was amazed,' said Mr Penn, concluding his comment that the game, 'Makes all the other golf simulations look clumsy and antiquated in comparison.' I also expressed my surprise, saying, 'The last thing I expected was a highly and instantly playable golf game.'

What makes *Leader Board* so enjoyable and appealing is its simple controls. The game's power meter is really easy to pick up and play, and makes aiming and hitting the ball an absolute breeze. Couple that with graphics that effectively convey the golf course, and you have a timeless classic that defined the standard for golf games for years to come, and is still fun to play today.



Ghosts 'n' Goblins

Publisher: Elite
Reviewed: Issue 17
Overall Score: 97%

I remember a travelling fair coming to Ludlow in the early summer of 1986 and bringing with it a bevy of arcade machines, one of which I hadn't seen before – Capcom's classic platform shooter, *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*. Many ten pence pieces were dropped into its coin slot as I attempted to conquer it, but despite my best efforts, I never managed to finish the game. Damn, was it rock freakin' hard!

A few months later, Elite's Commodore 64 conversion of that very same game arrived at the *ZZAP!* offices amid much anticipation from the team. While it didn't feature all of the levels of the coin-op original, we nevertheless raved about it. Gary Penn commented, 'I've played it and played it, completed it and completed it, and I STILL play it,' while Paul Sumner called it, 'A brilliant translation of the arcade game.' I went totally overboard, boldly stating that, '*Dropzone* was previously my favourite game on the Commodore 64, now a year later I can safely say that *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* has ousted it from its position.'

Nowadays, I wouldn't go quite so far as to say that – *Dropzone* has since returned to the highest echelons of my all-time favourite Commodore 64 games list, while *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* probably wouldn't figure in my all-time Top Ten – but I still think it's a cracking conversion. It looks good, features an excellent soundtrack, and packs some highly entertaining, if rather challenging gameplay.

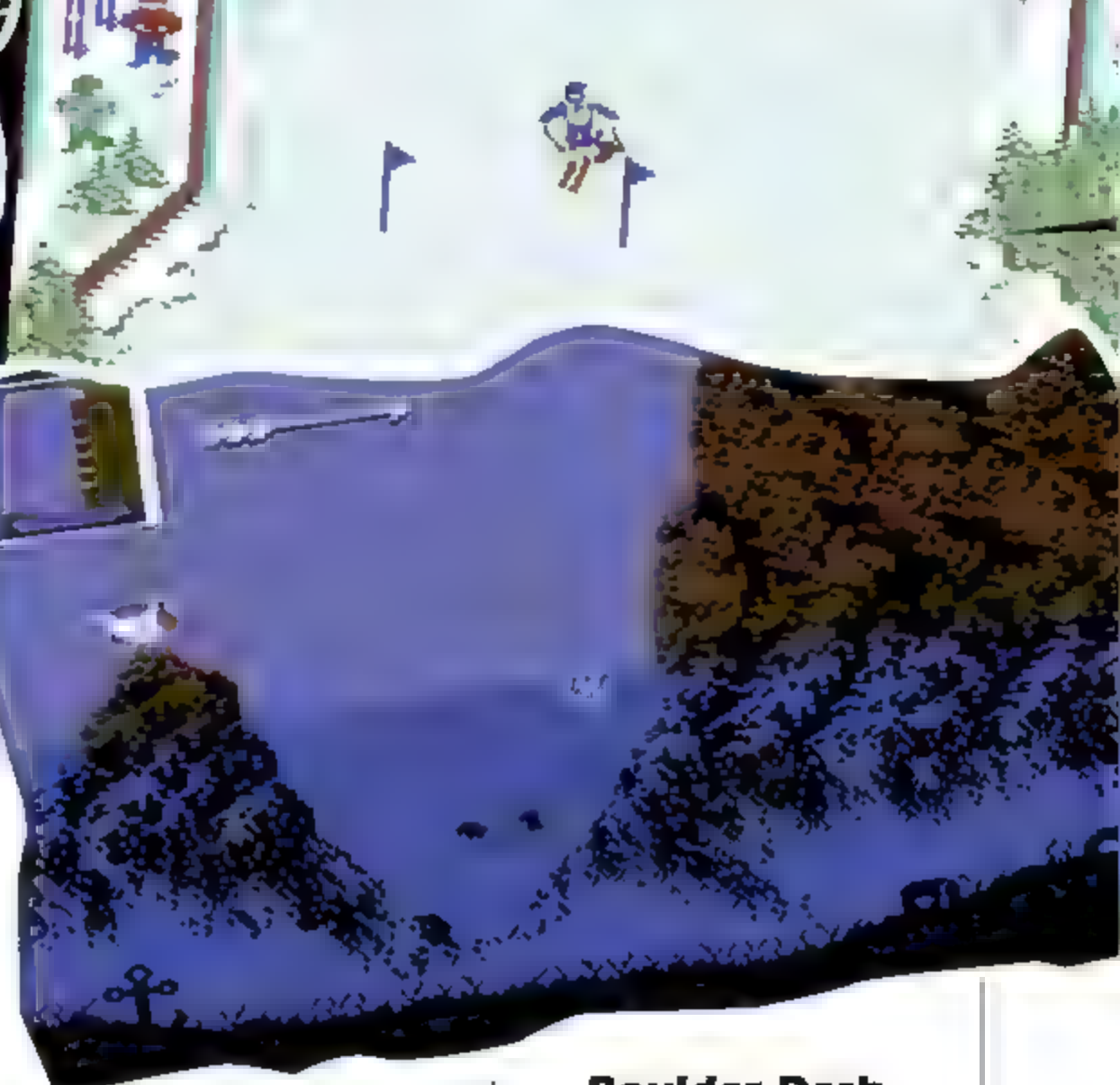
World Games

Publisher: US Gold/Epyx
Reviewed: Issue 19
Overall Score: 98%

Featuring eight highly original events that include such delights as ice barrel jumping, cliff diving, the caber toss, bull riding, and sumo wrestling, the latest in Epyx' Games series had us leafing through our thesauri in search of superlatives to describe its magnificence.

We all commented on the sheer quality of the graphics and sound, and lauded the game's 'out of this world' animation and amazing attention to detail. The praise didn't stop there. We also had plenty to say about *World Games*' outstanding playability, noting that each event was unique in its own right, and all were really fun to play – especially when several players were involved in the action. Indeed, the only thing that came in for criticism was the game's multi load format, but even then I felt that it was, 'Worth every second waiting for each event to load.'

As I mentioned earlier when I was talking about *Summer Games II*, I'm a huge fan of each and every entry in Epyx' Games series, and think they still stand tall today. Sure, some are better than others, but they're all at the very least excellent, and most are stone cold classics – especially *World Games*. It features some of the most well-drawn and animated graphics of the 8-bit era, and is still just as entertaining to play today as it was three decades ago.



Boulder Dash Construction Set

Publisher: Databyte/First Star
Reviewed: Issue 20
Overall Score: 97%

As regular readers of the finest Commodore 64 magazine in existence will doubtless already know, *Boulder Dash* is very much a *ZZAP!* favourite. Indeed, Oli Frey drew little cartoons of the game's mascot, Rockford, in the margins of every issue. So when this construction kit that enables budding game designers to create and play their own *Boulder Dash* levels arrived at the office, we were all excited to say the least.

'Construction sets are always great fun, but a *Boulder Dash*

one? Honestly, I flipped over this. It's brilliant,' said **Rich Eddy** in one of his rare comments for the magazine. Gary Penn and I both cited the kit's ease of use as its strong point, with Penn saying, 'Designing caves and intermission screens is simplicity in itself,' while I noted, 'The designer is extremely well thought out, and it takes no time to work out how to use it.'

I still think *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* is a winner today. It's not that hard to use, even by modern day standards, and creating your own levels is rewarding and fun. It's a shame they can't be saved as their own standalone game - all levels have to be played within the *Construction Kit* program – but considering the limitations of the Commodore 64, this kit is still a quite remarkable programming achievement.

The Sentinel

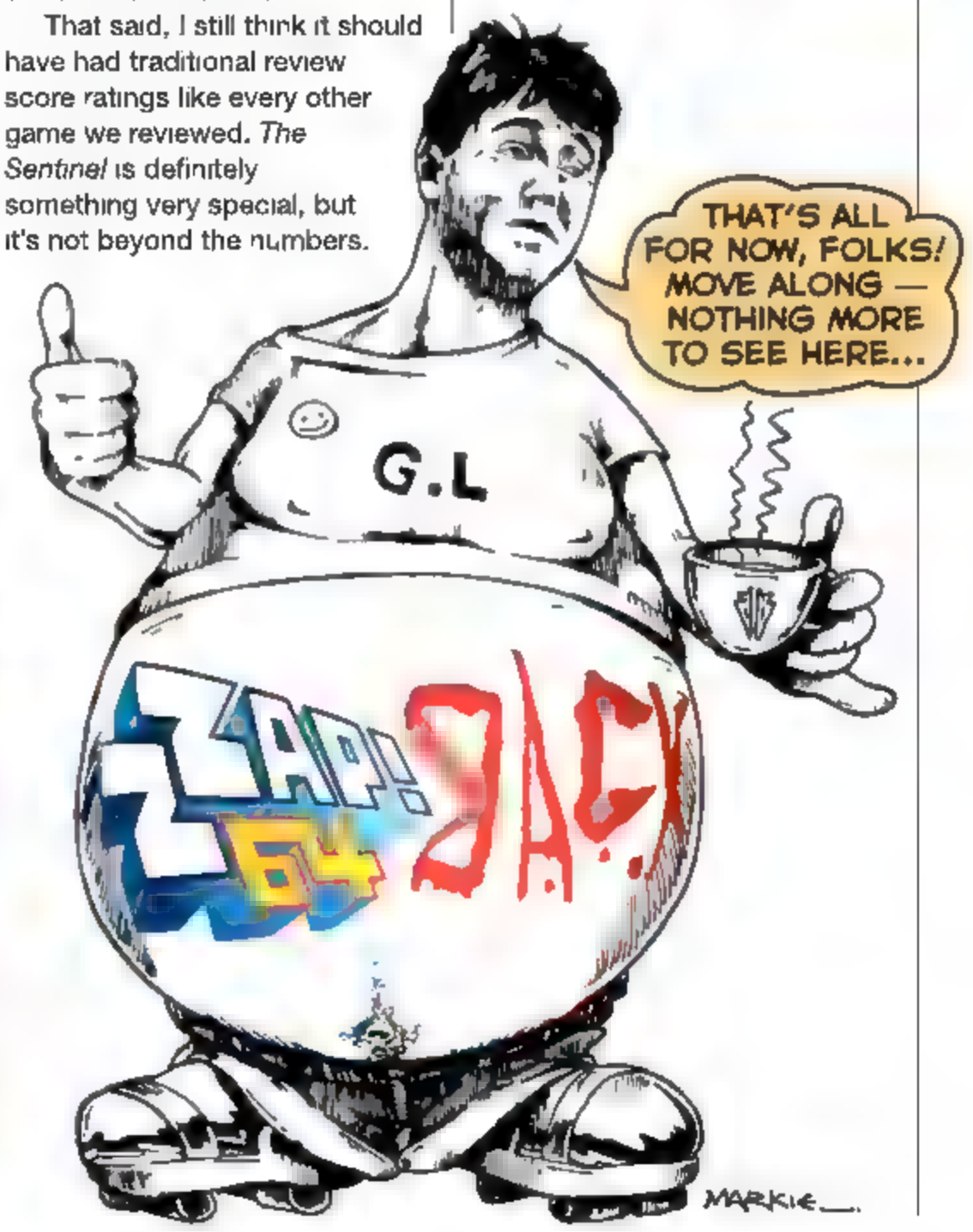
Publisher: Firebird
Reviewed: Issue 20
Overall Score: No Score Given

Oh boy, were there some arguments over the review of Geoff Crammond's highly innovative and inventive *The Sentinel* (known as *The Sentry* in the United States). First of all, some of the team members felt that it delivered such a unique and exceptional experience that it defied a rating. I vehemently disagreed, feeling that no game – not even one as amazing as this – was outside of ZZAP!'s comprehensive review system. However, I was voted down, and so for the first time ever, we had a Gold Medal game that didn't have an overall score.

But the bickering didn't stop there. No siree. I was also the only one who felt that the game didn't deserve a Gold Medal. To me, it was a Sizzler, but in the name of democracy I was out-voted by the rest of the team, and the game was duly bestowed ZZAP!'s highest award.

These days, I'm actually glad *The Sentinel* did get the gong. In the many years that have passed since we first reviewed it, I've changed my mind regarding the Gold Medal status of the game. *The Sentinel* is a truly remarkable program that packs an incredibly compelling strategic challenge as you transport yourself around the 3D landscape and attempt to take out the eponymous enemy. Yes, the screen rendering is painfully slow, but *The Sentinel* still gets your adrenaline flowing, and delivers a classic gameplay experience that's unlike anything seen before or since.

That said, I still think it should have had traditional review score ratings like every other game we reviewed. *The Sentinel* is definitely something very special, but it's not beyond the numbers.



THE ZZAP! COVER GIRL

In the 1980s female gamers were a rarity, but Karen Wild (then Gordon) not only loved her C64, but won a place on the cover of ZZAP!64 #28. Karen is now a dog trainer and behaviour consultant with over 17 years in the field. Noted author on the subject, she has a degree and diploma in psychology, is a full member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors and is an Associate Member of the British Institute of Professional Dog Trainers. Her association with canine behaviour must surely have been sparked by those lovable rascals Head and Heels. Chris Wilkins asked the questions.

“ Julian said he was sorry about . . the Last Ninja game being slapped over the top ”

• How did you end up being immortalised on the cover of ZZAP!64?

I was an avid fan and never missed an issue Once they ran a competition to come and meet the team and to appear on the cover, which I entered. We had to give a reason why they should choose us to win. I wanted to stand out on my entry form, knew there weren't many girls into gaming, and so jokingly said that they 'could do with the feminine touch'! I got a call saying I had won and a date to visit I went the day before my Maths O Level exam. I was very excited. The sad part was that none of my friends were into computer games and so I had nobody to tell.

• Take us through what happened on the day

My Dad took me, as we lived in Worcester which was fairly close He dropped me off and went off in search of camera shops. [*Hah! Good luck with that, Dad . . camera shops in Ludlow! — Ed*] Zzap! Towers was a doorway into the upper part of a building just off the main square in Ludlow, I think I remember pressing an intercom buzzer/doorbell and Glenys met me and took me upstairs. I believe she was dating Julian Rignall at the time and when I met them again a few months later they were engaged.

I met Julian Rignall, Ciáran Brennan, Steve Jarratt and the rest of their crew including Cameron the Cameraman They were super nice and very very funny. I was really really nervous even though they were very friendly. What you must remember is that I was very young, only 15, and an awkwardly self-conscious teen. I had to have a photo shoot, my worst nightmare, but because my other hobby was photography I ended up chatting to Cameron a lot.

Eventually the guys came to find me and they showed me their office, how they reviewed the games, and I had a little play on a few I was incredibly nervous so I didn't take it all in. We went upstairs to other parts of production and they copied me a couple of **Star Trek** posters that they had on the walls, I was very excited about that!

• What was it like inside ZZAP! Towers?

It smelled of curry a little! Apparently because someone had had a curry Pot Noodle for breakfast . . [*That would be Julian, no doubt, lived on 'em — Ed*] The vibe was very informal and there was lots of machinery, as you might expect

• Was it how you imagined it to be?

No. I hadn't expected it to be so office- y, I guess my head was full of the design of the magazine and you don't realise there are real people with jobs and personal lives behind it all.

• Were you a big fan of ZZAP!64?

I had every single issue in a huge pile. I always listened to Julian's advice and to Gary Penn, both were my favourite, but in fact I liked them all. ZZAP! was funny, intelligent and warm. It really felt like the heart and soul of the gaming world had come alive in the mag I couldn't wait for it to come out and used to read it from cover to cover, keeping up with the gossip and wondering why they liked Jeff Minter's stuff so much (I still don't get it, it never clicked with me and I have no idea why that was, because he seems like a terrific guy, really talented)

The biggest reason I liked ZZAP! apart from the above was that I had virtually no money and the only games I could ever afford were the budget ones. This meant that if I bought a rubbishy game that was it for weeks – wasted money. So, the reviews meant I could pick out which ones were worth it. Of course, I read the reviews for the expensive games but never got any They were way out of my league. (Get the violins out!)

• Other than the Star Trek poster, did you get any other goodies during the visit?

I did! I think I got a T shirt and a binder for the mags, which I still have with mags in it. I also got a bag full of games which I was very excited about because some were the expensive ones. I got a copy of Krakout which has, by far, the best music at the time and still I can hear it in my head. I played the hell out of that game

• Did the cover turn out how you expected?

I didn't know what to expect and when I saw it in the newsagent I showed the lady at the till. She was suitably unimpressed, but I was very excited! A few months later I returned to Ludlow

Photos courtesy of Karen Wild

on a school trip to their outdoor theatre While wandering around I bumped into Julian and Glenys who I think showed me her engagement ring! Julian said he was sorry about the cover, and I didn't understand He said something about the *Last Ninja* game being slapped over the top If you look carefully, there is something partially underneath but I have no idea what happened At the photos I was asked to pretend I was sitting and holding the characters from *Head Over Heels* (I still have these photos!) so maybe they had a redesign. Anyway I was still really chuffed about being with the Knight on horseback. I have been asked to sign copies of the magazine since then, which is really flattering

• Girl gamers were pretty rare back in the day What was it like being into gaming as a female in the 80s?

Lonely! That's pretty much it I was at an all girls Grammar school, so boys were sadly scarce My friend's brother used to copy his own games for me which was really nice of him. I know that was illegal pirating but I had no money at all and I was not going to turn down the chance to play games I would never otherwise have seen

I used to play for hours, and if my friends came round I would of course beat them because they didn't play That wasn't much fun for them I am sure I kept all my high scores and still have them

I say lonely but I did have friends, just not computer game friends. That didn't matter so much because games put you in a different world, don't they? Not like online gaming, I never really thought about 'being a girl' being part of it but I am into lots of hobbies that are male-dominated and it has never really occurred to me that I was any different. I have never seen it as a disadvantage or really an issue apart from when other people mention it.

• What were your favourite C64 games?

I think I played the hell out of *Twin Kingdom Valley*, *Collapse*, *Krakout*, *Trollie Wallie*, *Summer Games*, *Winter Games*, *Booty*, *Aztec Challenge*, *Forbidden Forest*, *Impossible Mission* and *Dropzone* . . but ooh there are so many more I loved *Summer* and *Winter Games* but once you had won all the gold medals it got a bit repetitive so instead I used to aim for the biggest faceplant off the vault, the worst belly-flop high dive or the most falls during an ice-skating routine. Now that was fun!

• Did you move on to other gaming systems after the C64 era was over?

No, never had those systems, again, money was an issue as I was by then a student I worked for ICL for a while, doing a bit of programming and designing interfaces to be easy for humans to understand, but I didn't want to get into coding in a big way. Later, I did move onto PC games and then Playstation, then I had children and didn't get much chance to breathe let alone play My kids got into it, we got a Nintendo Wii when it came out and I got back into it a little – *Rabbids 2* is still a family favourite, and of course I have to win every time. My son is really into online gaming and very good at it I got my C64 out for him and he couldn't believe I was beating him on it, haha!

I do play a few online things on Xbox and PS4 *BattleFront* and *Doom* most recently – but I would say I just don't have the time to get really good at them and as a noob you get minced up pretty fast I much prefer my QuickShot II joysticks to the controllers we now have - if only they worked on everything! I also like **Injustice – Gods Among Us** and games like that (**Super Smash Bros**) because I do like beating up my son's virtual characters; it's the only chance I get to be about as good as he is, except he is always better

I like mobile apps especially puzzle type games and my absolute favourite from these is the whole 'Five Nights at Freddy's' series. I **love** that series and the whole geeky genre that goes along with it. My iPhone is never out of my hand and I am obsessed with technology still

• Do you still have your C64 and your ZZAP!64 magazines?

Yes, and a bunch of games. I don't have all the magazines, I kept my favourites still in the binder.

• Why do you think that people loved ZZAP!64 and the C64 so much and continue to do so today?

I don't think people realise that the only other place these games were available were arcades, or Atari systems which were unbelievably expensive and cartridge only Spectrum was weaker for me because you used a standard tape recorder of your own, which was often unreliable I had had all that with my ZX81 and it drove me nuts. With the C64 and its own C2N tape drive it was much more reliable and I just felt like it was part of a big family, along with ZZAP! and the crew

As a teen it was an addictive pastime and just seemed to hook me in. I guess that says a lot about the game designers and that they were really written for love of the involvement rather than simply because it was a crappy excuse for a film spin off (for example, *Scooby Doo* was a horrible game!)

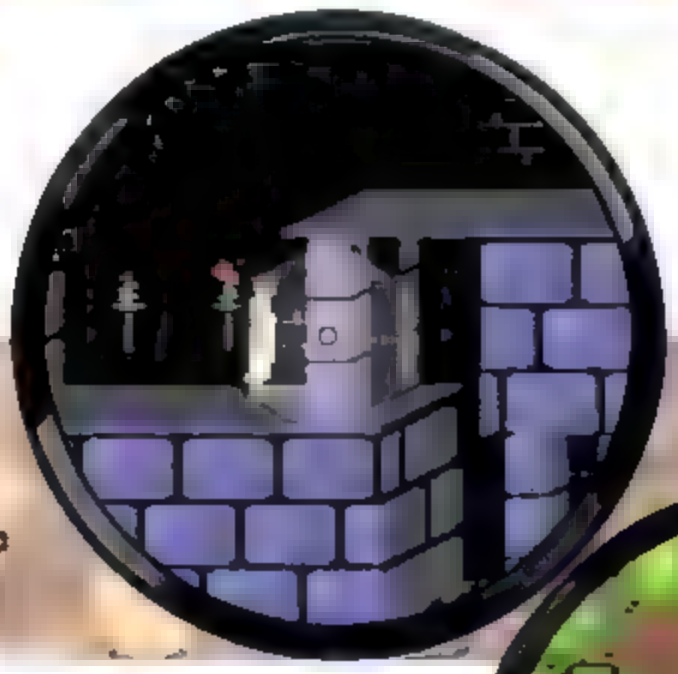
Back in the 1980s there really wasn't anything that compared to the C64's computer games scene It was a wonderful time I only have to hear the music for *Forbidden Forest*, *Krakout* or *Aztec Challenge* and it takes me right back ■

Then, 'gorgeous pouting Karen Gordon'... and now; Karen Wild brandishing the news page (107 for pedants) of the August issue announcing her victory.

SID'S TOP 10

Collated by Professor Brian Strain

The SID chip continues to produce some outstanding tunes, so let's look back at the soundtrack highlights from the last few years.



10 PRINCE OF PERSIA

Music by Andreas Varga (Mr. SID)

This conversion of the Jordan Mechner classic requires the EasyFlash cartridge, as the game constantly loads data. The music is based on the PC MIDI data, making it sound really close to the original.

9 WONDERLAND

Music by Sean Connolly

A fun action-RPG (with hints of the *Legend of Zelda*), this was an entry into the RGCD 16K cartridge competition. The music is suitably epic, building and changing over its 4-minute running time.

8 CANABALT

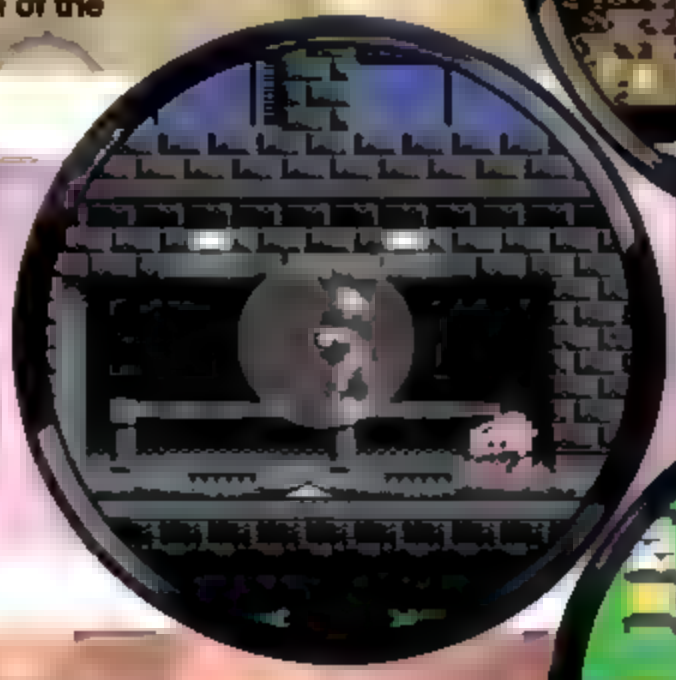
Music by Mikkel Hastrup (Encore)

One of two attempts to re-create infinite runner *Canabalt* on the C64 (the other being *C64anabalt* by Paul Koller), this features a superb rendition of 'Run' by Danny Baranowsky – a tune from the original app.

7 TURRICAN III

Music by Smash Designs (SoNiC, Jeff, KB &AEG)

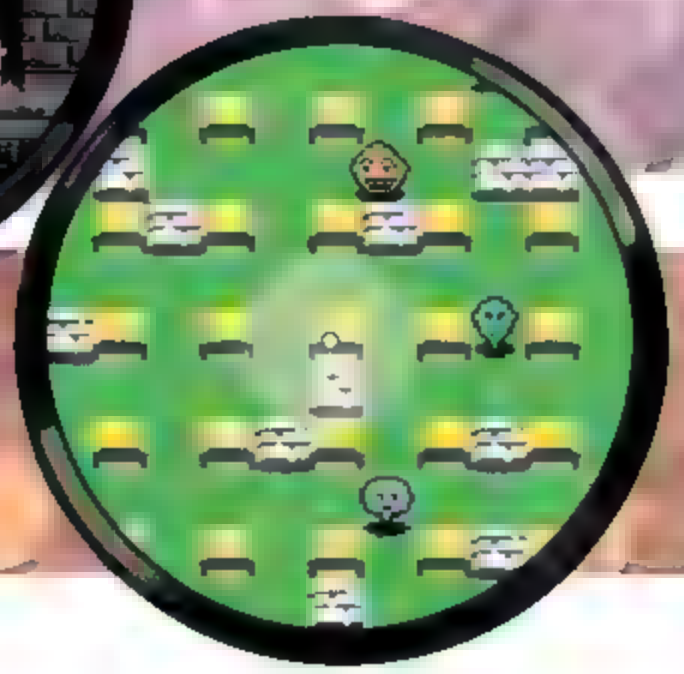
This ambitious attempt at continuing the Manfred Trenz series required four musicians. There are covers of Amiga *Turrican* music by Chris Huelsbeck which really fit the bill, and a cover of a tune from *Enforcer* (another C64 shoot 'em up by Manfred). The orginal compositions keep up the tempo and aggression of the soundtrack nicely.



6 HESSIAN

Music by Owen Crowley (Conrad/Samar)

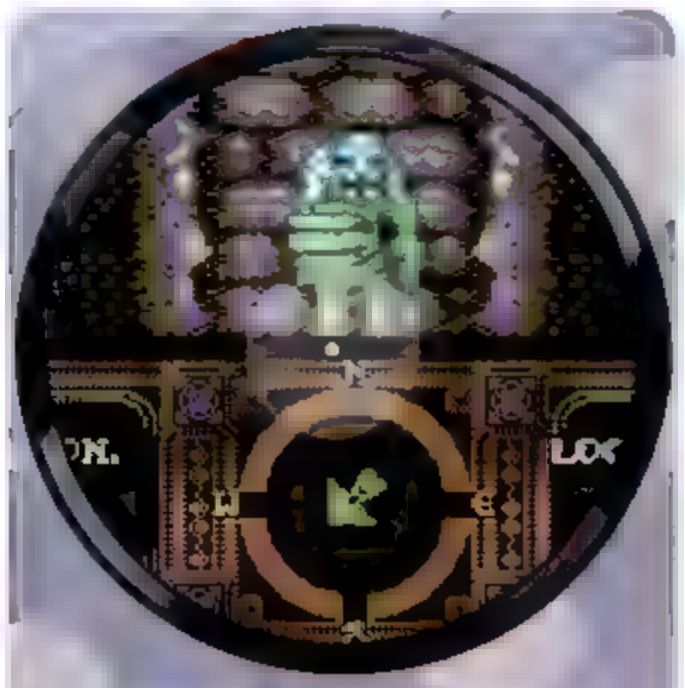
Lasse is responsible for the outstanding Goattracker, a PC utility for writing SID music (and making sound FX) used in many recent games. Playing in a run & gun style like his earlier Metal Warrior games, Hessian features several great tunes composed by Lasse himself. 2018's Steel Ranger has another enjoyable Lasse soundtrack.



5 BOMBERLAND

Music by Lasse Öörni (Cadaver/Covert BitOps)

This classy game from Samar is the closest the C64 has come to Bomberman, compatible with the four-player adapter for multiplayer fun. It sounds really good too, with the music drawing inspiration from the classic SNES Bomberman games.



4 ARGUS

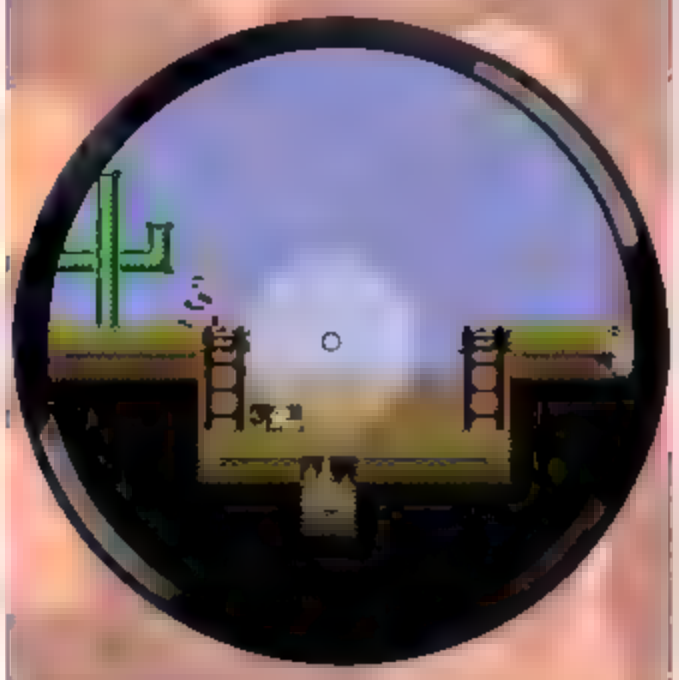
Music by Saul Cross

Saul has been a revelation in recent years, producing top quality music and graphics for many C64 games. Trevor Storey's impressive first-person RPG is greatly enhanced by Saul's music, notably in its homage to Rob Hubbard's classic *Master of Magic* theme.

3 JOE GUNN

Music by Thoma Egeskov Petersen (Laxity/Maniacs of Noise)

This flick-screen tomb raiding adventure has a superb soundtrack. The title tune evokes the classic John Williams score for *Indiana Jones*, while the in-game track is suitably mysterious and dark.



2 KNIGHT 'N' GRAIL

Music by HANS AXELSSON (TDM)

Wide Pixel Games have gone on to produce a sequel to this excellent *Metroid*-style game, but the original's soundtrack really shines. With some clever use of flute-like sounds, it generates a great medieval atmosphere while a frenetic tune kicks in during boss encounters.

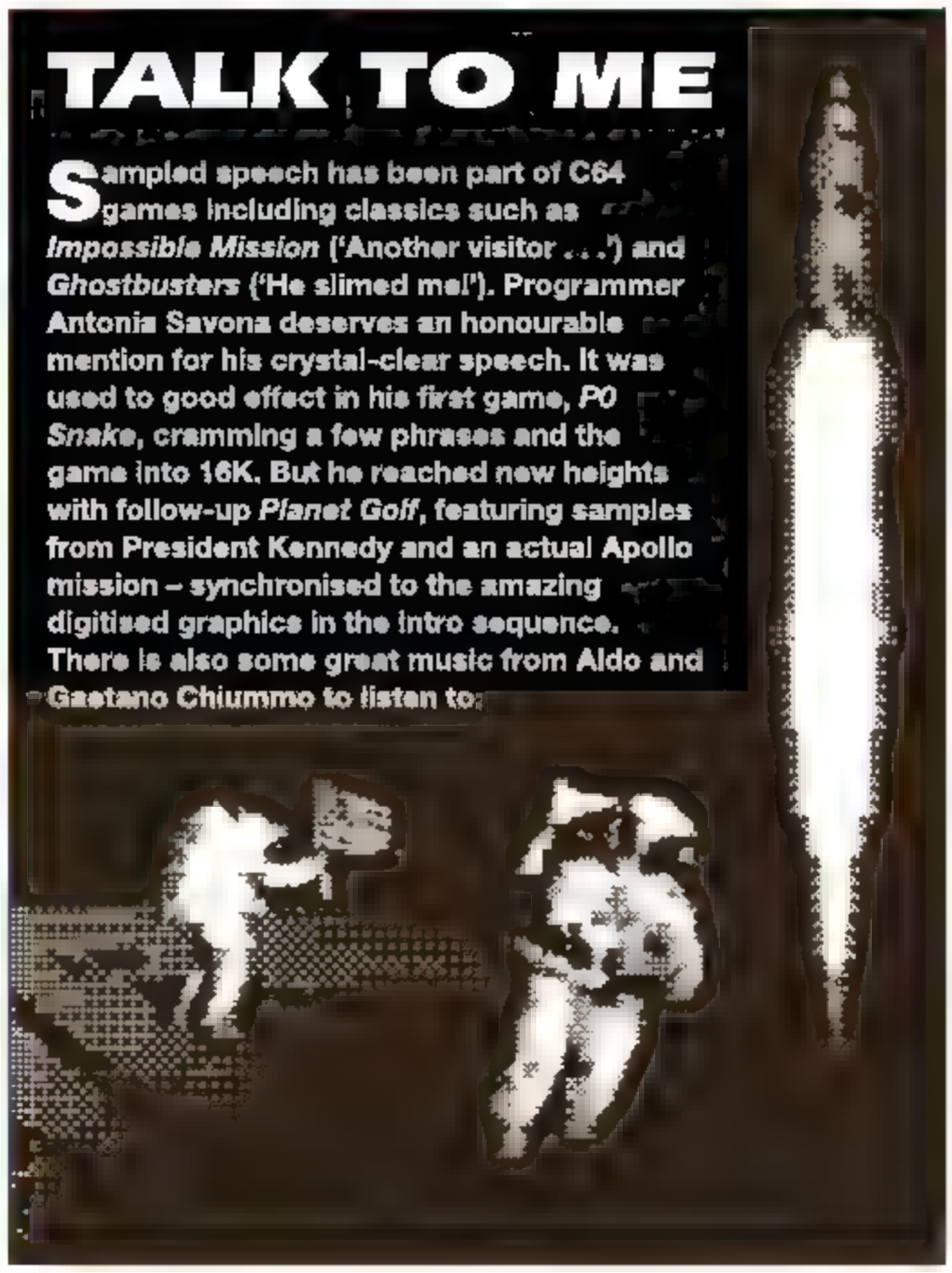
1 SAM'S JOURNEY

Music by Alexander Ney (Taxim)

Knights and Bytes have produced one of the best C64 games ever, and the Taxim soundtrack deserves huge praise. Like the best console games, the music changes mood and tempo to suit the style of the level. And it's great to listen to outside the context of the game. Believe the hype, this game and its music are outstanding.

TALK TO ME

Sampled speech has been part of C64 games including classics such as *Impossible Mission* ('Another visitor ...') and *Ghostbusters* ('He slimed me!'). Programmer Antonia Savona deserves an honourable mention for his crystal-clear speech. It was used to good effect in his first game, *PO Snake*, cramming a few phrases and the game into 16K. But he reached new heights with follow-up *Planet Golf*, featuring samples from President Kennedy and an actual Apollo mission – synchronised to the amazing digitised graphics in the intro sequence. There is also some great music from Aldo and Gaetano Chiummo to listen to.



Rob's Return

One of the most unexpected developments of 2017 was Rob Hubbard's decision to pick up his trusty source code again, and start typing in hex values – after an extremely long time in which he swore that he would never touch SID again. The story starts with Project Hubbard; my megalithic Kickstarter that was successfully funded November 2017.

by Chris Abbott

One of the aims of the Kickstarter was to fund the definitive book about Rob Hubbard that covered everything from his life to the technology he used. Part of that involved revisiting Rob's unreleased works and delving into the Rob archive. It is a plentiful resource, ranging from unreleased rock operas to deleted sub-tunes from EA games, to jazz.

Some of Rob's original SIDs were essentially SID covers of previous work (*WAR* and *Chimera*, for example). It was natural to ask, 'what would have happened if he had chosen different tunes from his back catalogue to turn into SIDs?'

Rob had already provided us with his old EA source code but unfortunately his UK source code had been disposed of when EA UK moved offices, which is one of the big tragedies of C64 history.

One of the keys to the Alt-SIDs project was the ex-Graftgold legend Jason Page (ex-Sony, now working for Unity). Jason set to work, working with Rob to resurrect the old EA source code and started to correspond with Rob about getting the old code to work.

However, Rob beat us to it – he had downloaded the *IDE C64 Studio*, navigated its eccentricities, and got the code to compile with a test tune which was pretty funky!

It soon became clear that Rob's EA source code had ditched a lot of what was in previous SIDs:

'I noticed that when I did the EA stuff, I left out some features, like chord wobbles and a few other things which I thought were too frivolous for the US punters. So it's a bit conservative. It does feature waveform overrides and 16 byte patches. But you can only get 16 patches max.

'Since this is running as a separate piece of code we can afford to do a real divide in the vibrato – something I couldn't do back in the day, since it took up too much CPU.

'The big pain in the neck was always doing pitch bends from what I remember.'

While Jason got on with porting Rob's source code to Unity to create *RobTracker*, Rob knuckled down and dug out a piece he had written the music for but which he had never recorded. It was called 'The Rock Tells the Tale'.

'It's something like a large rock that's been stationary for thousands of years and you wonder what tales it could tell, and strange things it's seen, and yet survives and outlives us all . . . '

It was a difficult process for Rob to come to grips with the SID again:

'In other news - I've been trying to create a SID tune – it is very, very difficult. God knows how on earth I did it back in the day. We'll see – I have a few months to finish it. So far, only ten bars!'

It took him a lot fewer than 'a few months', with 'The Rock Tells the Tale' finished within a few days,

'Very, very, very difficult being so restricted, and I can't go back 30 odd years to that mindset. I don't even like the wobbly chord stuff anymore. Anyways, maybe it doesn't sound like typical RH: I've tried to write it as if it was 1987, and well, done a few things that I might not do nowadays. You'll be better to judge than me.'

However, luckily for the fans, his worries were unfounded. Sporting that distinctive Rob Hubbard sound, it was a slow and reflective piece with sampled drums. It's not so much a return to form, as a direct continuation of his SID composing career as if he'd never been away.

At this point, Rob decided that he would start reverse engineering his own code, starting with an already-existing (and annotated) *Monty on the Run* decompilation.

'I can't believe how much the drivers and music data structures changed over the years, and it's such a bloody tragedy that those disks were lost.'

To get a handle on the various changes, Rob delved into decompiling and analysing his previous work, including the whole of *Delta*, *ACE 2* and *Nemesis*, and started to liaise with Jason to get a few of the features from earlier SIDs backported into this *RobTracker*.

The code that changed the most from SID to SID was the pulse-width modulation routine, but most of Rob's SIDs had unique features, since Rob often edited the code as well as the data to add new features for a specific tune, or to make enhancements to save memory or resources. The only way the *Delta* in-game music would work, for example, was to have an incredibly complicated series of nested musical phrases as procedures, which drove him mad trying to debug.

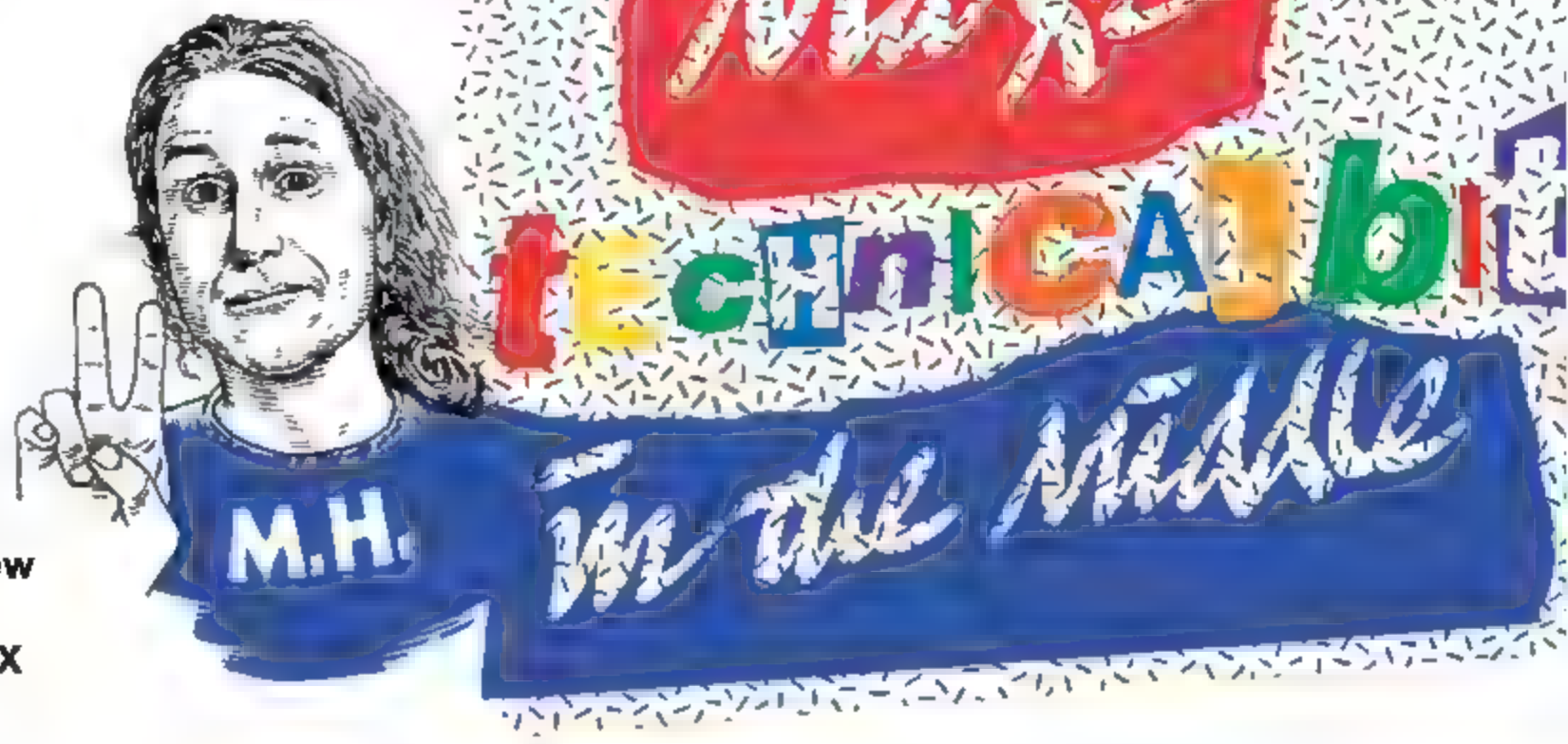
Thanks to this analysis, Rob performed detailed decompilations on *Commando* and *Arcade Classics* – both landmark pieces in his career – which will appear in the Project Hubbard book.

Other SIDs Rob went on to write include *Pygmie's Revenge*, which originated as a tongue-in-cheek tune composed in response to a request from one of the developers on *Populous*, who asked for SFX (on a PC speaker, no less) of 'demented pygmies sitting round the camp fire'; this is that tune.

For more information, check out *Project Hubbard* at http://www.projecthubbard.com, which will (eventually) give you the chance to listen to the new SIDs, and read all about Rob's life, history and new SIDs in detail.

EXPANDING THE SOUND EXPANDER

For those who love to make music on their Commodore 64, Professional Music Technology's MAX HALL takes a look at the new FM-YAM, an updated version of the Sound Expander from XeNTaX



Have you ever fancied nine extra FM (Frequency Modulation) voices on your humble Commodore 64? Well back in 1985 you could have done so by purchasing Commodore's own SFX sound expander that incorporated a Yamaha YM3526 (OPL1) sound chip, which turned the sound produced by your C64 into something that resembled the PC's Adlib Sound card. Pretty clever stuff for 1985!

Fast-forward to March 2018 and a very clever chap called Mike Zuurman, or Mr Mouse as he is known on the scene, has built an updated version of the Sound Expander called the FM YAM.

This cartridge, like the SFX, adds nine extra voices of FM synthesis to the C64, but with a few nice extra twists to boot. Most notable is that you can now mix in the C64's three voices of SID and – if you're feeling clever – an extra channel of DIGI as well bringing the total voice count up to an astounding 13 voices, all from a stock Commodore 64!

The new cart incorporates a Yamaha 3812 (OPL2) sound chip, which has been modified to improve sound output over the original SFX Sound Expander

So how does it all work in practice? The cart itself is a 3D printed affair, a nice bright red colour, and it looks just like the myriad of Commodore 64 cartridges that have gone before, except for the two 3.5mm jack sockets at the top of the unit. The right socket is for the **stereo output** of the FM audio from the cartridge so you can connect it to your sound source, like an amp or mixing desk. The left socket is a **mono input** so you can add the output from the C64's SID into the audio line, thus mixing the signal with the FM sounds from the cartridge itself – something the original SFX did not offer

I had no need for the left input while reviewing the FM-YAM because my C64 SID signal goes to a mixing desk in the studio – all I had to do was take the audio output from the cart to the mixer and I could then combine the FM and SID.

At the time of writing the device is still in development so it does not yet offer custom editors. My first port of call was to load up the original Sound Expander software, which does indeed offer an editor for music, synth patch and riff editor This software works perfectly with the new unit and allows you to create songs, edit synth patch sounds and even get backing rhythms to play along to straight out of the box. For non-programmers this is a neat addition to have and really is quite a lot **of fun.**

If you're more handy **at programming,** the FM-YAM can offer **a lot of options for** creating new music on **your C64. The** unit is compatible with **a PC DOS** program called EDLIB, **which is** a music tracker for sound cards that support the OPL2 sound sets – exactly what the FM-YAM is designed to do. You can track music on your PC, then save the music in a D00 file format. And then you can play it back on your C64 using some clever player code by XeNTaX.

Some musicians and programmers have been busy with this unit already and created some great demos for the FM-YAM that show the full potential of this hardware Notable productions are 'Vibrants FM' by XeNTaX that provides a nice selection of FM 9 voice tracks and 'SID Fishes' also by Xentax that shows off the full 13 voices (9 FM, 3 SID and 1 DIGI).

All in all this is a great device and musicians and programmers from the scene are already tapping into the potential this unit has to offer. Yes it isn't easy to get into if you are not a programmer, but you can always have a good old fester with the **original SFX Softwa**re and the brave **can get busy** with the tracking **and** hacking player code to get this unit singing!

This unit is great value for money, costing **a** mere 38 Euros **and** will probably be **cheape**r than getting an **original** SFX Expander. I **personally** have had hours **of fun with** this device, just **listening to d**emos and playing **with the origin**al SFX software **editor. I am also** looking forward to what the demoscene will do with this unit – I am sure there is some great stuff just around the corner

Totally recommended. ■

RESOURCES

Website – http://c64.xentax.com
EDLIB Tracker for DOS – http://www.pouet.net/prod.php?wh ch=13357
XeNTaX Player code for D00 files – https://csdb.dk/re ease/? d=157163
SFX Sound Expander software –
http://www.zimmers.net/anonftp/pub/cbm/demodisks/c64/sfx/sfx.d64.gz
Vibrants FM – an Ed ib mus c co lect on by XeNTaX w th mus c by Vibrants -
Link: http://csdb.dk/re ease/? d=157163
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rh7wKVmw3vs
Sid Fishes – a proof of concept, combining 9 FM channels, 3 SID channels **and a "fourth"** DIGI SID channel, resulting in 13 channels of mus c.
Link: http://csdb.dk/re ease/? d=157574
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbD9O0yFGZo

ZZAP! PUB CHAT

In its day ZZAP! often hosted chats between programmers, game designers and musicians. For the Annual CHRIS WILKINS managed to get ARCHER MACLEAN, SIMON BUTLER, PAUL HUGHES, [illegible] GRAY and ROBIN LEVY together over several pints of Ludlow's Best in the Bull Inn.

As time goes by, memories fade, you know what it's like! So it's important that the gathering remind me exactly what each had to do with the Commodore 64. Of our august guests, the most succinct is:

Matt Gray 'Musician!'

Chris 'Well, that's nice and simple, Matt! What about the rest of you?'

Paul Hughes 'I guess I'm known for Freeload – the Ocean loader I also programmed initial versions of Ocean's C64 music drivers after Martin Galway, and I worked on some mediocre titles, like *Operation Thunderbolt*, and some utterly terrible – *Mag Max*! Some were good though, such as *Combat School*.'

Simon Burton 'At Ocean I worked with such stalwart and talented chaps as Paul Hughes *[pats on the back]*, John Meegan and the late, great Allan Shortt. I worked on all the 8-bit machines, but had most hands-on experience with the C64. My first encounter was on Denton Design's less-than-stellar *Transformers*. Strangely, this turned out to be their most successful title.'

Archer Maclean 'I'm proud to say that I wrote a few games for it, namely *Dropzone*, *International Karate*, which was called *World Karate Championship* in the US, and lastly *IK+*.'

Chris 'As a graphics designer, Robin, your work graced several Thalamus games.'

Robin Levy 'Yes, as one third of Cyberdyne Systems I was artist and level designer on *Armalyte*. I did a few loading screens for *Hunter's Moon*, *Hawkeye*, *Citadel*. I also worked on the aborted, hugely over-ambitious *Deadlock*. I did most of the C64 art for System 3's *Ninja3* and *Turbo Charge*. The C64 was utterly pivotal in setting me on my life's path. It was that, a local computer shop and *ZZAP!64* that contributed to my meeting the other members of Cyberdyne Systems.'

Chris 'ZZAP! was an important catalyst, then. Did the magazine have any impact on the rest of you, and what were your favourite covers?

Archer 'Oh, every month featured an excellent cover with amazing artwork by Oliver Frey. Most were memorable and became iconic in their own right. They should have been sold as full-size posters! [*Many are available as limited edition prints, nudge-nudge —Ed*] Naturally I liked Issue 3 entitled "Dropzone Rockets In From UK Gold", leaving me wondering why it didn't say "US Gold". That all came out in the wash some years later during the inevitable legal case to get paid my royalties.'

Matt 'ZZAP! took over as my number one mag to buy once I left the Spectrum behind. I always looked forward to picking it up. Favourite cover has to be the *Last Ninja 2* issue – obviously!'

Robin 'I was an admirer of Frey's comic art since before Crash. So many wonderful covers to pick from. If I had to choose a single one it would be Issue 2's melting nuclear face. It was so scary, topical and striking – I detached it from the magazine for fear I'd be banned from getting ZZAP! in future. I chose this cover to include as part of an image I did for Sam Dyer's C64 book.'

Simon 'ZZAP!64 was the go-to magazine for all things Commodore game-related. The other magazines on the high street were tolerable, but the Ludlow boys turned out product that was more in-tune with the zeitgeist of the day. It was great to look at, well laid out and just amateur enough to have that handmade, punkish feel about it that gave you the feeling that it wasn't just being churned out by some suit who saw a market and decided to milk it.'

Paul 'ZZAP!64 meant legendary artwork from Oli Frey, great developer features and, importantly, fair reviews from multiple points of view. There are so many classy covers to choose from but the very first issue from May 1985 – *Elite* was the one that got the ball rolling, followed by November 1985 – *Paradroid*, and finally January 1990 – *Operation Thunderbolt*, because it was one of my games!'

Simon 'I don't have one favourite cover, but I do like Issue 11 with Oli doing a great Chris Foss homage piece for *Mercenary*. I have to say I like Issue 34 because it has a cracking image for *Platoon* which is one of my better C64 titles, even though I didn't actually do any artwork; but I did design the game and do storyboard work which was translated excellently by the various artists.'

Paul 'Out of all the C64 magazines there was only ZZAP!64 with its Sizzlers and Gold Medals that you really cared about. I think, for the most part, the reviews were fair – having multiple points of view from multiple reviewers really helped in making any buying decisions. With my games, if I'm brutally honest, some probably got better reviews than they deserved.'

Robin 'ZZAP! appeared at just the right time opening with a review of *Elite*, a game I desperately wanted. The early editorial tried embarrassingly to be edgy but the reviews were good and in-depth. Plus it had Minter's column which was a big draw. Although, I have to say that early on I agree with Minter in as much as it really did feel like it was written 'by 12-year-olds for 12-year-olds' and some of the editorial hyperbole read like early essays from a future *Daily Mail* journo. However once production moved to Ludlow, the mag's editorial style and layouts improved a hell of a lot.

'Reviews weren't the best part of ZZAP!, it was the features: the game diaries, interviews with devs and teams, the Compunet galleries (a big one for me), Gary Penn's fantastically in-depth gaming tips and Oli's beautiful maps, the Terminal Man, the feuds unfolding between contributors, publishers and rival mags, the casual extreme violence in some of the spot illustrations, and the round table discussions with creators and musicians talking about the highs and lows of the business. A brilliant insight into the development of a young creative industry.'

Simon 'It's obvious that ZZAP! was made by creative people for a creative and exciting industry and even though – agreeing with Robin here – some of the "journalists" put my teeth on edge and made me want to slap them bandy, I pretty much agreed with every review. They pilloried the vast majority of my Commodore product with one or two well-deserved exceptions, and even though Julian Rignall turned down an invitation to my house-warming I never held it against him.'

Chris 'That's big of you, Simon. I'm sure Jaz will make a point of coming to your next house-warming. Talking of invitations, who visited ZZAP! Towers?'

Archer 'I went many times. First to show off a pre-release version of *Dropzone*. They had to see it running on a C64 to believe all the hype being put out by US Gold. I went back numerous times over the years, including for the 1986 SuperStar Challenge with Braybrook, Minter, Chris Butler and Tony Crowther. It was a good laugh, although I can't remember much after the tenth pint of cider later that night. I was also involved with dozens of other regular monthly articles, and wrote a few hints 'n' tips type pieces.'

Matt 'I never did go and I never met anyone from ZZAP! until many years later when I met Gary Penn. I suppose Paul Cooper was connected there while he was at Thalamus and I met and worked with Paul several times.'

Paul 'Alas, I never went either. The Newsfield crew visited the Ocean Dungeon a couple of times, nearing the seasonal push, so they could preview titles we had in the pipeline en-masse for Christmas. I particularly remember Julian Rignall wandering around and being slightly in awe of this famous reviewer and *Defender* grand master.'

Simon 'To be brutally honest I wouldn't have known where Ludlow was if you'd held me at gunpoint. I was far too busy pushing pixels to be a fan-boy, and I was a tad on the "old" side for such shenanigans. I have met the wonderfully dynamic duo, Roger and Oli, on several occasions since, but we haven't swapped autographs. We're past that first blush of hero-worship and know better than to indulge in such things.

Robin 'I was never invited to ZZAP! Towers, but as Cyberdyne Systems we

did speak to Jul an Rignall and Steve Jarrett at a show in 1987 to show our tech and art demos. They were both incredibly friendly and encouraging and this ultimately led to a call from Paul Cooper of Thalamus. It took a few years to finally meet Gary Penn and Gary Liddon. I worked around Liddon for a time but I always saw Penn as the guy to impress, his gameplay tips were excellent and his game commentary was particularly insightful. I respected his work and felt that he really knew what he was talking about. Thing is, he seemed to dislike my work. That was fine – I took his criticisms to heart in an effort to improve. I did once hear from Liddon how Gary thought I was trying to imitate Dokk, which amused me as it was a totally accurate observation!'

Chris 'Looking back, which games really showed off what the C64 could do and do you think you pushed the computer's boundaries?'

Paul 'Quite a few Ocean games used my multiplexing, scrolling and general optimisation tricks – those core routines – so I was always proud of that. As for games that pushed the 64, well, *Bubble Bobble* with all its software Bubble sprites always impressed me, as did *Uridium* with its 50Hz scroll and lovely presentation. A lot of the Thalamus titles were technical tours de force and *Dropzone* brought the arcade to the machine.'

Robin 'I loved *Dropzone* too, and played right all the way through my time with the 64. Strangely, after being a bit crap at it for a couple of years (100K being my top score) I could regularly reach Megastar rating after once playing the Atari version.'

Archer 'Thank you, thank you! But for me, making three men jump about the screen in *IK+* was quite a challenge, mainly because I'd already used up every available sprite making the two-man *IK1* / *WKC* game and I somehow had to then devise a new method of plonking a third fighter on the screen that had to be either in front or behind the other two, depending on the game state. I made the third man out of character blocks using the compressed animation data for the sprites, but had to swap the method on the fly for which players when in front / behind each other, and for which colours were to be done in sprites or characters. That needed a load of extra coding because it wasn't all sprite-based anymore. All the hit-point collision detection had to be done with X/Y offset maths based on known target areas on the fighter bodies and where various head/fist/foot contact points were.'

Robin 'I have to say that although *IK+* impressed me I thought its long-term appeal was seriously lacking. Rushing on (!), as an artist and designer, technically pushing the boundaries was far less important to me than making a fun game so special mention has to go to the design of both *Boulderdash* and *Bombuzal*. Braybrook never failed to impress – *Paradroid* was sublime – very impressive design and gameplay feel and the Graftgold conversion of *Rainbow Islands* blew us away. Braybrook was a very good graphic designer too.'

Matt 'I remember being really impressed with *Impossible Mission*'s graphics and animation. And music-wise *Rambo* and *Sanxion* loaders blew me away. But I wasn't a great games player, I was more interested in the music and general atmosphere surrounding games on the 64.'

Archer 'That's one area that the C64 always excelled at – the astonishing SID chip. I am amazed that even today, 30 years later, full blown orchestras are playing the theme tunes to my *IK* and *IK+* games, and many other Hubbard original scores.'

Simon '*Operation Wolf* by Colin Porch was more than a little amazing, as was his stupendous version of *Head Over Heels*. He did a sterling job on both titles, a true gent of the development scene and a C64 wizard. I wasn't one of those people who knew whether a game was pushing any given machine to its limits; I simply had titles I liked or disliked. There are too many great games on the C64 to list them here. I would probably only be trotting out all the obvious titles, so I shall leave you guessing.

Chris 'Great or poor, games got rated. I wonder how important ZZAP! reviews of your games were to you? Do you remember any in particular and were there scores you thought unfair?'

Archer 'Without a doubt ratings and comments were important to me, almost like waiting for some strict school teacher to mark your exam work .. But more particularly they were important to the sales and ordering processes employed by the publishers to pile up the day-one ship-out to get the games into the charts.'

Simon 'I agree with Archer that the reviews were more important to the powers-that-be – at Ocean – than me personally. I knew what my product was, if it was a turd or not, and as such I never expected the impossible when it came to review time. I was simply looking toward the next title, a possible bonus for the job just completed and trying to stay out of trouble as much as humanly possible, which for me was the hardest job while at Ocean!'

Archer 'I wasn't that bothered about criticism but I remember some illogical remarks, such as *Dropzone* criticised for not having multi-channel background music. The game was so fast and manic and with so many key warning sounds going on, that I felt any additional noise filling the audio spectrum would have ruined the intensity of the gameplay.'

Robin 'It was an enormous thrill to learn we got a Gold Medal for *Armalyte*. Getting approval from ZZAP! for our work was tremendously important to us; at Cyberdyne we were driven more by making something cool than making a buck ... although that didn't last because we couldn't provide a living wage for ourselves.'

Simon 'I remember *Platoon* being well received and enjoyed the review for *Shadowfire*, but as I said I didn't really care what people said about my titles. I was never that precious about things in those days. I'm not sure if I am now. I do remember them saying that my version of *Athena* looked as if it had graphics drawn by a blind baboon using crayons. Thinking about it, they were right on the money with that one.'

Chris 'Do you have an interest in what's happening in the C64 scene?'

Paul 'I still look out at the demoscene. There's some clever stuff going on out there to pull off 3D at a reasonable speed on the sub 1MHz 6502, plus there's all the hardware trickery that has been uncovered over the years that intrigues the heck out of me, especially when the guys have taken the hardware apart to figure out why these tricks work.'

Simon 'Not in the slightest. I've gone on record as saying that I'm a freelancer and basically I work for money, so the chances of me being paid to do C64 graphics is as likely as Martin Galway ever putting his hand in his pocket to buy the beer! I see no reason to be looking backward. As fine a machine as the 64 was, it did have more than its fair share of problems for pixel pushers so I'm in no great hurry to inflict them upon my aging head once more. Onwards and upwards, I say.'

Archer 'Oh I'm the opposite! I'm always amazed at the enthusiasm of all things retro, and glad to be part of it!'

Matt 'Not much beyond what I'm doing with the C64 music remakes. But it's great that people are still developing on the platform.'

Robin 'I still get excited and have the same work ethic when working on something as I had when I was 18 – I put a ridiculous number of weeks into creating and optimising the *Hunter's Moon Remastered* intro animations for instance. It's great to see other teams really stretching the C64 with new releases, particularly games like *Sam's Journey* that are applying more nuanced modern gameplay design sensibilities. I hope they make enough money from that to help fund new games but I suspect the market, such as it is, cannot sustain anybody working on C64 games full time. The most exciting development for me is the viability of storing games on cartridge as the old limits imposed by memory and the speed and capacity of magnetic media are largely rendered irrelevant.'

Chris 'Which leads neatly onto TheC64 Mini. What do you think of it?'

Paul 'I love mine! My only grumble with it is the bundled joystick; it looks like a Competition Pro but feels like a Quickshot 1 with less finesse. All in all, it's a lovely package: well-conceived, well executed and for what I think is a fair asking price. I recommend it!'

Matt 'I haven't used it yet but it looks cool and I did the menu and promo music for it, including a pure SID version of the menu track.'

Archer 'Haven't got one yet, but it looks cute for sure. Much want.'

Simon 'I have no feeling about it either way. If I want to play old games, I'll use MAME. I don't so I won't. I hope that made sense. It did in my head ...'

Robin 'Lovely little system and a real delight to plug into a TV. But Paul's right – the joystick lets it down. It feels like an old Quickshot that's been ruined by a gang of overenthusiastic *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* players. As a result I've hardly played any games on it; *Paradroid*, *Armalyte* – anything that needs precise movements – are completely unplayable.'

Chris 'And that leaves us with the question most people are desperate to have answered by such a great bunch of the good and famous : what would you say to Lloyd Mangram if you ever met him?'

Matt 'Where is Lord Lucan and Shergar?'

Archer 'Why the long face?'

Robin 'I'd offer to buy him a virtual pint and ask him to pass on my regards to the White Wizard, Paul Sumner, the Scorelord, Rockford and Thing.'

Paul 'I may have met him several times in another guise shall we say Ahem. However, if I'm mistaken, I'd ask him why he stuck with his Hermes Typewriter instead of those new-fangled word processors!'

Simon 'Do you know your name is an anagram of Grandma Molly?'

COVERTAPE CRACKERS

SIZZLERS

The best tapes to ever grace the cover of ZZAP!64

Forget what the pessimists and the purists might spout, covertapes were great! Yes, they did become borderline omnipotent in the magazine's later years. And you Oli had to adapt his wonderful cover illustrations to create space for an unpleasant plastic cassette. But overall covertapes were good for gamers, providing demos of the hottest new games and full versions of older commercial titles. By 1990 the covertapes had become an integral part of the monthly ZZAP! mix and over the years there were a total of 67 tapes. Here MARTYN CARROLL selects ten of the very best tapes, the ones that were stuffed to bursting with gaming gold. Let's press play on tape...

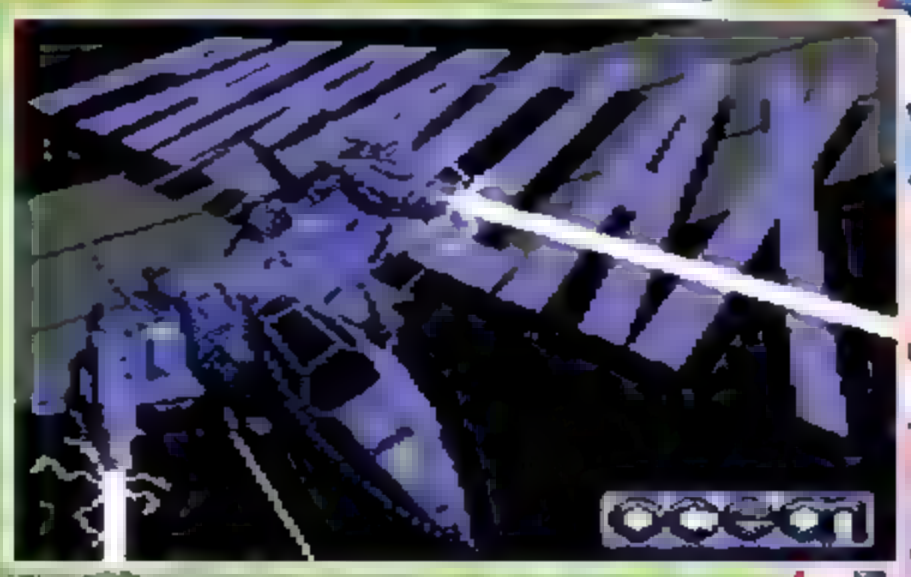
The ZZAP! Sampler

This was it, the mother of Commodore covertapes. It couldn't claim to be the first but the ZZAP! Sampler was the most significant and for many 64 owners it was the first experience of finding a tape stuck to the front of a gaming mag. The contents were certainly eclectic, including playable demos of *Gnbbly's Special Day Out* and *Revenge II*, a rolling demo of *The Last Ninja*, the Mix-E-Load from *Delta* and other curiosities. The tape also included an audio **remix of the *Sanxion* loading** theme performed by Rob Hubbard. Was it worth the 50 pence cover-price bump? **Abso-bloody-lutely.**

The Sampler featured a demo of Yak's *Revenge of the Mutant Camels* sequel and a teaser for *The Last Ninja*.

Hit Squad

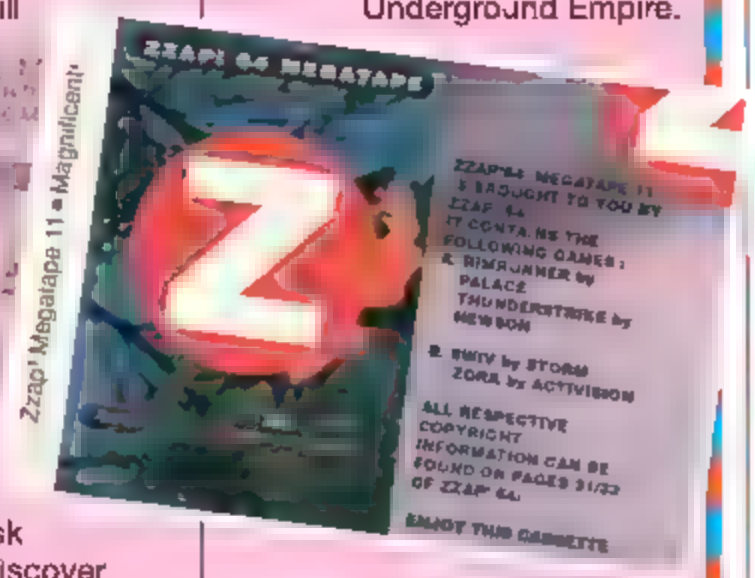
This was the first tape to include a full game (if you discount Megatape 1's *Time Tunnel* which was a last-minute replacement for the pulled *Katakis* demo). And what a game it was. Sensible's shmup *Parallax* scored 93% when reviewed in our October 1986 issue, and here, **just three years** later, it was stuck to the front of the mag. It was a clear win for readers, especially as the following year Ocean would re-release it on its Hit Squad label where it retailed for £2.99! What's more, on the flipside was a playable demo of Ocean's huge Christmas hit *RoboCop*. We'd buy that for a dollar (or rather 25p on top of the usual cover-price).



The full version of *Parallax*, given away? What hocus-pocus is this?

Megatape 11

The headliners on the issue 67 tape were *Rimrunner* and *Thunder Force*, two very average actioners. But at the bottom of the bill was the real star of the show – *Zork*, or rather *Mini-Zork*, a condensed version of the legendary text adventure that was specially adapted to be loaded from tape. So everyone who'd read about Infocom's amazing titles but didn't own a disk drive could finally discover what they'd been missing. The game did receive a (very) limited release in 1988, but thanks to ZZAP! many more people could take their first faltering steps into The Great Underground Empire.



Get lamp and beware the Grues. Welcome to *Zork*...

Megatape 21

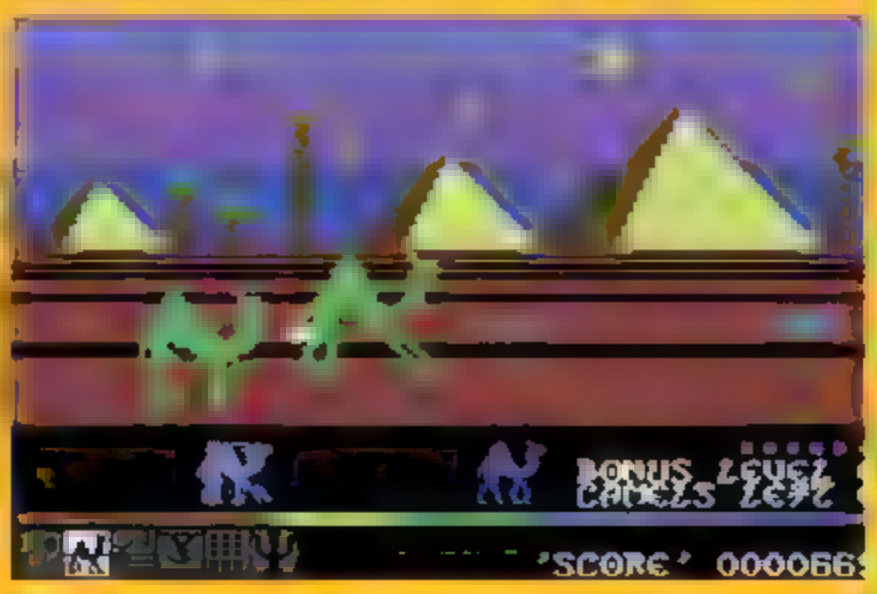
Lords of Midnight may have been a Spectrum original, but absolutely no ZZAP! fans were complaining when Mike Singleton's masterpiece was included on the issue 77 tape. After all, this was one game where you could use the word 'epic' without fear of hyperbole. The only issue was that the original game came with a hefty playing guide that was essential to surviving the hostile land of Midnight. Happily, all of the key information was included inside the mag, and there was even a summary of the game's scene-setting novella. The adventure continued in *Doomdark's Revenge*, which appeared on Megatape 22.

Legendary *Lords of Midnight* graced Megatape 21. Our work here is done.

The work of famed C64 coder Andrew Braybrook was well represented on our covertapes, with crackers like *Alleykat*, *Undium* and *Heavy Metal Paradroid* appearing in 1992. This particular tape contained probably his most endearing title, the brilliant platformer *Gribbly's Day Out* which was originally released in 1985. But what elevated this tape above others was that it also included *Batalyx*, the mini-game mash-up from another friend of ZZAP!, Jeff Minter. And if that wasn't enough, the tape provided a complete change of pace with *Nythyhel*, an old-school text adventure from Anthony Collins. What a fine, fine collection.

Megatape 25

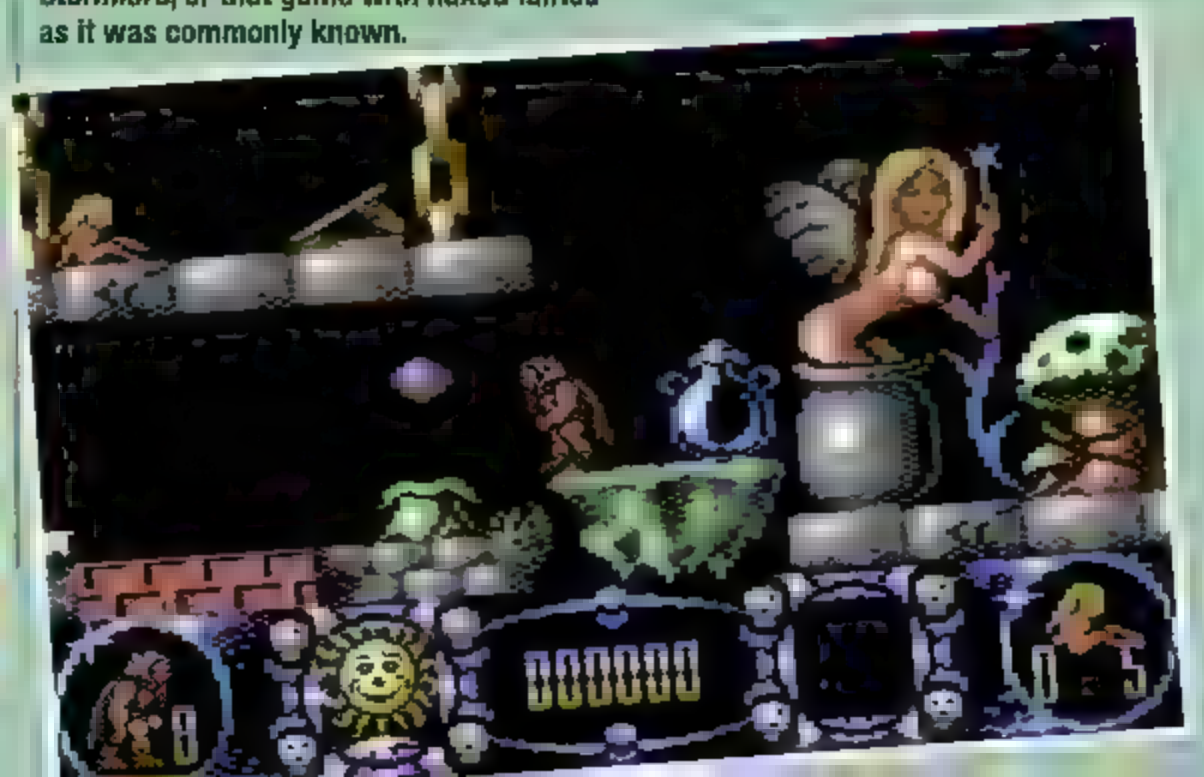
***Gribbly's* AND *Batalyx*? Monsieur, you're really spoiling us!**



Megatape 34

We were now in the twin covertape era, where there were genuine concerns that quality software was being spread too thinly. Issue 89 did little to dispute the 'all filler no killer' label thanks to several reader submitted efforts and slightly dubious PD releases spread across its two tapes. But Megatape 34 did include two great games from Hewson in the shape of *Stormlord* and *Ranarama*. Both were titles that just failed to Sizzle when reviewed in ZZAP!, so there was a good chance that many readers had overlooked them. *Ranarama* in particular was an understated game that rewarded perseverance

***Stormlord*, or that game with naked fairies as it was commonly known.**



COVERTAPE CRACKERS

Reel Action 1

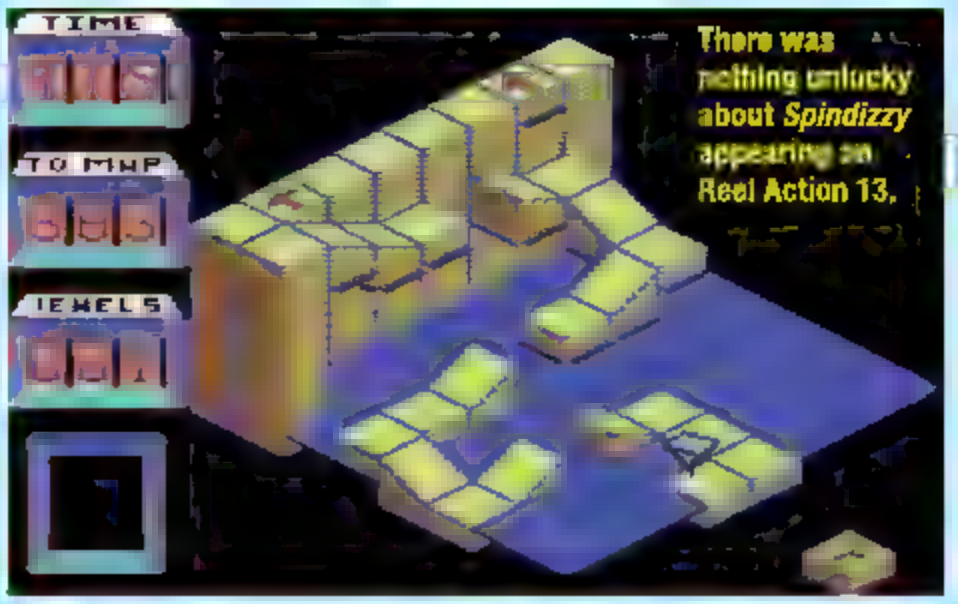
Commodore Force got up and running with one of the greatest covertapes ever.

It was all change at the end of 1992 with ZZAP! rebranded **Commodore Force** and the Megatape renamed Reel Action. There were still two tapes carrying the usual mix of content, but to celebrate the 'new' mag the first tape was a real treasure trove. Topping the bill were two quality coin-op conversions from Virgin Mastertronic: racing game *Continental Circus* and vertical shooter *Gemini Wing*. In retrospect both titles were slightly underrated by ZZAP! Rounding off this fantastic tape was a demo of *Lemmings*, the highly anticipated conversion of the cute 16-bit hit

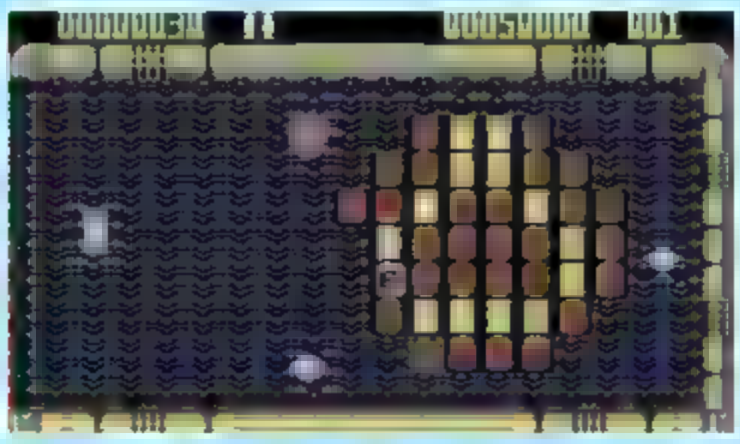
Reel Action 22

With no new games to demo the last few covertapes became a home for hits from the 64's heyday. This certainly wasn't a bad thing as many of the mag's younger readers may have missed them first time around. Activision's *Ghostbusters* was a case in point. The original release pre-dated ZZAP! and despite it selling about a billion copies since then, there must have been a few latecomers who had yet to play David Crane's excellent tie-in. Yes it was older than Zool, but it was still the best *Ghostbusters* game on the 64 (the door's over there, fans of *Ghostbusters II*)

Film licenses didn't come much bigger or more memorable than *Ghostbusters*.

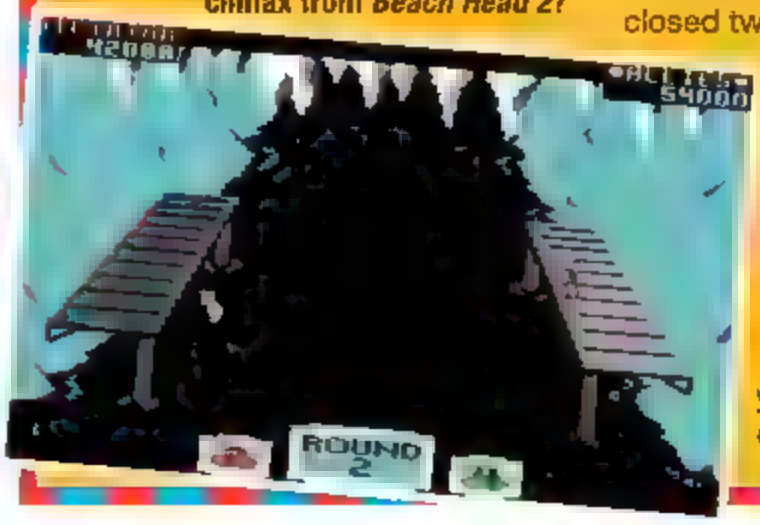


By the time Commodore Force issue 7 hit in the summer of 1993, there was a shortage of new software and the covertape became the cover-star. You could be forgiven for thinking it was 1986 all over again when you saw *Spindizzy* splashed across the cover of your favourite mag. But Paul Shirley's isometric classic was deserving of the exposure, having scored 98% first time around and still holding up well seven years later. The lead title was strongly supported by Gremlin's *Breakout* reinvention *Krakout* and Firebird's funky budget title *I Ball*.



We're not saying that Krakout was underrated in our original 55% review, but . . .

Who could forget the knife-flinging climax from *Beach Head 2*?



Reel Action 27

After months of twin covertapes the mag reverted to one as 1994 rolled around. This tape featured just the two games – but they were both brilliant. First up was *Impossible Mission 2*, a sequel which lived up to the reputation of the classy original. And then there was *Beach Head 2*, another golden oldie which came to life when two players went head-to-head. This would prove to be one of the very last covertapes as the mag closed two issues later, with the March 1994 edition being the final one.

Did you manage to collect them all, or do you have some gaps in your covertape collection?

Mel Croucher's UNDER THE BAUD-WALK presents MEL'S SECOND CHILDHOOD

FEELING REBORN, AGAIN

Wow, will you look at this! I'm in the pages of ZZAP! again after 30 years! That's a whole lifetime for some readers, although to me it seems like a slight pause. I have been told that the publication of this Annual is made possible by the faith of a great many crowdfunders. So thank you, oh brave new world that has such people in it It's not so much back to the future, more like future to the backer And it's obvious that this future world holds true wonders between its firm glossy covers

For example, have you seen the competition prize? (Just flip this page over . . .) In my years of absence from these pages the mighty C64 has been reborn as the C64 Mini, and I too feel reborn because of it. Now you can be reborn as well and win one of these little wonders to relive the joys of your first childhood. Seeing as I have already entered my second, I got my C64 Mini the day it was released, and it's my privilege to tell you all about it.

THE 'EAT ME/DRINK ME' C64

The C64 Mini looks the same as I remember, but the clue is in the name. The colour of the casing is still a fetching shade of hog scrotum by moonlight, but the machine itself is only half the size of the original. I know the feeling. There are still two joystick ports for the purposes of gender fluidity, and in the interests of consumer choice there are no less than eight control buttons arranged around the directional knob As for the display, games can be experienced on a widescreen super-hi-res monitor, but if you are in a nostalgic frame of mind then there's a retro mode to turn the clock back on the screen so it looks like a badly tuned cathode ray tube Oh what fun

HEALTH & SAFETY FIRST

The games themselves are all built in, so on the down side I will no longer be able to arrange their little plastic cases in arcane patterns on my shelf, but on the up-side there's no cassette deck to chew up streams of ferrous oxide I wasted a bit of time trying to hack the games with some favourite cheats before I discovered that the keyboard is completely non-functional and purely there for nostalgic reasons But hey, that's fake news for you.

Anyway, I'm very pleased to see that the manufacturers have taken full account of modern health and safety practices, because in my opinion you can't have enough of them. The user instructions warn me not to insert foreign objects after Brexit, and that *Wanted Monty Mole* may cause epilepsy if I don't wear loose fitted underwear, and I should never play parallax scrolling sequences while asleep in a lightning storm, or use the machine to bludgeon anyone to death unless I have unplugged it first.

But in terms of the entertainment contained within the C64 Mini, let's think less about the small print and more about value. What is it really worth?

ESTABLISHING VALUE FOR MONEY

Well, commodities and currencies are difficult to quantify, but for me the value of entertainment can be expressed by what the mass of consumers are able to pay, willingly, in finite terms as a unit of exchange. I will define my preferred universal unit of exchange for you as **The Pint Of Beer**

For my overseas readers, I should explain that 'a pint' is a unit of volume peculiar to the British Isles, and is used to measure liquids and prawns for human consumption. And 'beer' is an alcoholic beverage used as currency by the Egyptians around 4,300 years ago,

Mel Croucher's UNDER THE BAUD-WALK

and recently perfected by the Oakleaf microbrewery of Gosport.

When I purchased my first Pint Of Beer, it cost me ten-pence-halfpenny, which means nothing to you, but to me it represented a substantial investment. The relative cost of The Pint Of Beer these days differs wildly from town to town and country to country, but I know exactly how much it is worth in terms of entertainment. Now let us apply this universal unit of exchange to the entertainment industry in general, and video games machines in particular, then see how it applies to the C64 Mini, and whether or not we are getting ripped off.

A ticket to see a provincial symphony orchestra currently costs me no more than 6 Pints Of Beer. Great value, considering there can be 40 musicians working hard to entertain me with their sawings and puffings.

A ticket to suffer a shite band performing shite compositions in a shite venue also costs me 6 Pints Of Beer. Poor value. But when it comes to recorded music, as opposed to live music, the situation has been reversed. My first record single cost me 1.5 Pints Of Beer. It was the perfect rock'n'roll package called *Move It*, by a snarling cock-rocker called Cliff Richard, and it represented good value. The most recent single I bought cost me 0.3 Pints Of Beer, as a download from iTunes. Excellent value.

A DELUGE OF FOAMING BEER

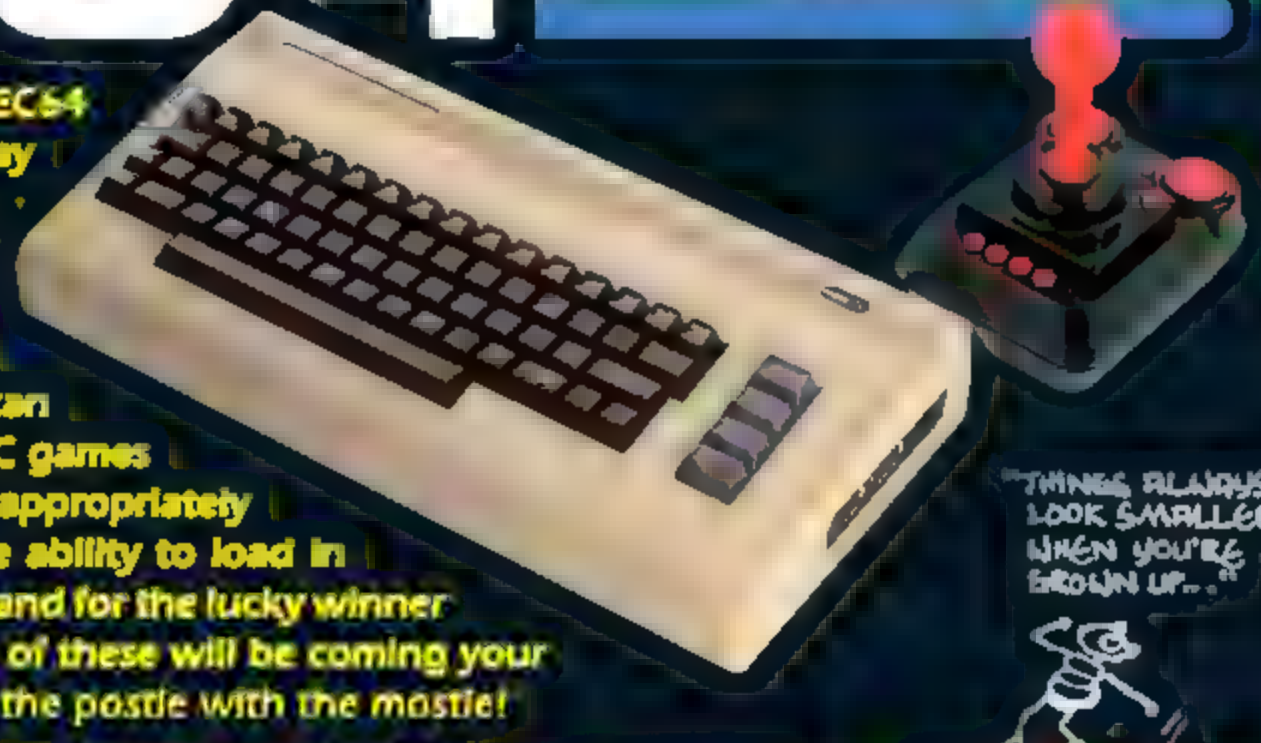
Now let us apply this system to the cinema. When I first started revelling in movies, viewed through a haze of fug from massed rows of cigarette smokers, my ticket in the stalls cost exactly 1 Pint Of Beer. Good value. Today, when I experience the sensory overload of modern cinema through the stench of prole-fodder, my ticket in the stalls costs 2.5 Pints Of Beer (including senior citizen discount). Questionable value. But if I wait a couple of weeks until I can download the same movie direct to my Sony Bravia smart TV, it only costs me 1 Pint Of Beer. Good value.

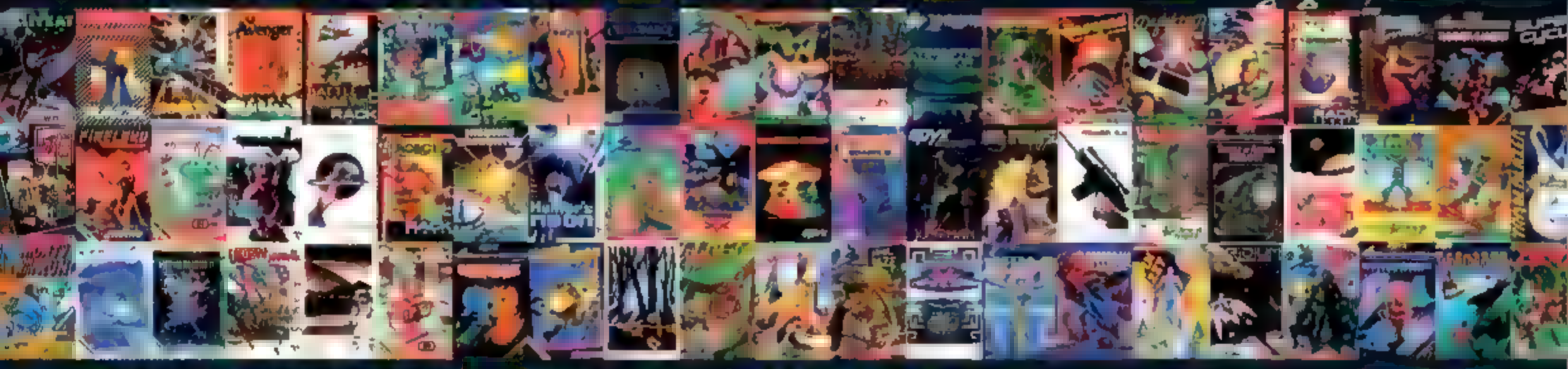
For aficionados of the Commodore 64, the increase in value has been even more radical. Back in 1982 the cost of the original C64 was an extortionate 479 Pints Of Beer. Very bad value indeed. Today the cost of the C64 Mini is only 21 Pints Of Beer, and they chuck in 64 games as part of the package. Surely this is the bargain of the century! But don't worry if you've invested all your beer money on this publication and can't afford the delight that is the Mini, you've still got a chance to relive your *Skool Daze*, waggle your *Thing On A Spring*, and have a day out with *Gribbly*. So stop reading this and turn your attention to the page right opposite. Enjoy your second childhood. Go on. You know you want to.

COMPO ZZAP! 64 COMPO

THE C64 MINI

If you missed Mel Croucher's rave about THEC64 MINI go back a couple of pages and pay attention, otherwise read all about it on page 110, how its creators put together this amazing compact version of the trusty old Commodore 64 – and anyway, who needs a working keyboard (you can attach one if you're going to start up BASIC games programming again). With a bundle of – appropriately – 64 great classic games on board and the ability to load in almost any others, THEC64 MINI is a must – and for the lucky winner of this Fusion Retro ZZAP! competition one of these will be coming your way, care of Royal Snailmail. Watch out for the postie with the mostie!





In keeping with the ZZAP! Competitions Minion's high standards of erudition, intellectual achievement and because he won the 1989 Bull Inn pop-a-pint-in-ten contest, all you have to do is answer his four multiple-choice questions accurately, honestly and with good intent. And then follow the instructions at the bottom of the page to submit your answers. First correct entry out of capacious Wilkins Family Logistics skip gets THEC64 MINI.

So here we go...

1. Which month in 1982 did Commodore officially release the Commodore 64 in the US?

a March b July c August

2. What's the length of TheC64 Mini?

a 20 cm b 24 cm c 32 cm

3. We all know what BASIC is, but what do the letters stand for?

a Back-up Application Synchronous Insertion Capsule
b Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code
c Basically, A Spectrum Is Crap

4. At the time, which was the most bestest computer in Britain? Was it...†

a BBC Micro b ZX Spectrum c Commodore 64

Answers on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope by 15 January 2019 to: ZZAP!64 Annual Compo, Fusion Retro Books, 51 Dencer Drive, Kenilworth CV8 2QR.
First correct answer drawn from Lloyd Mangram's paper bag wins!! Oh, and no arguing, the publisher's decision is final!

†Hint

ZZAPPED into oblivion

These are the stories behind the 'lost' games that failed to emerge blinking into the light of day – the ones that were...

We all remember the very best games that ever got awarded a Gold Medal in ZZAP!64, but we have forgot the terrible games that impulse purchases that we regretted wasting money on. But what about the unreleased games, the MIA titles that were teased, previewed or even reviewed in the pages of ZZAP! but denied us for (for whatever reason)? These are particularly memorable as they represent an opportunity missed, a promise unfulfilled.

This feature by MARTYN CARROLL is a continuation of the one Ian Osborne compiled for Commodore Force issue 5 (ZZAP! issue 35 in old money). It was this original feature that prompted ZZAP! lad Frank Gasking to begin Games That Weren't, a research project that has since compiled information on more than 1,000 unreleased titles and resulted in a number of high-profile books. Without this sterling work this feature would be sketchy at best – here's a huge hat tip to Frank and friends of GTW64.

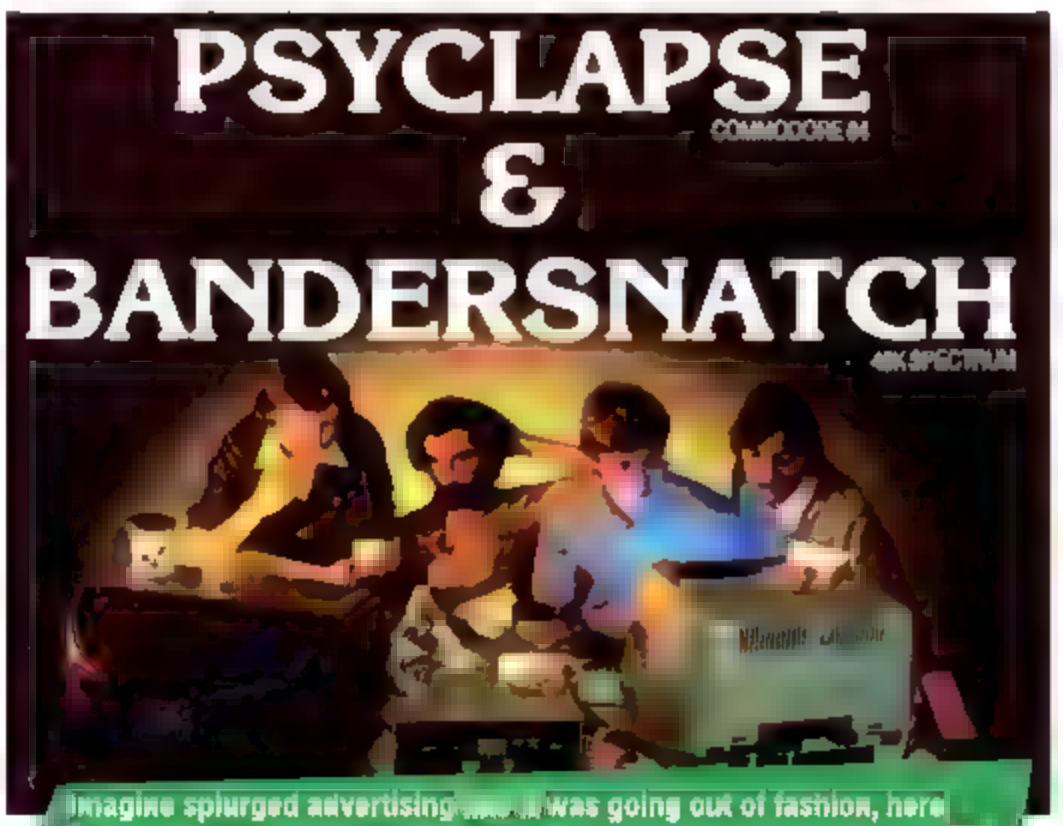
PSYCLAPSE

The name Psyclapse will be familiar to many C64 owners, as it was a Psygnosis label which published several titles in 1989 including *Baal* and *Ballistix*. But years before, *Psyclapse* was the name of an actual game – a 'Mega Game'

from Imagine Software that was so revolutionary it would instantly render every other C64 game redundant.

How's that? Well the Mega Games were built on the preposterous notion that 8-bit gaming had peaked by 1984, and the only way to create new interactive experiences was to ship the games with a piece of extra hardware that contained oodles of graphics and sound. The highly inconvenient elephant in the room was the expected retail cost of around £40. Yeah right.

The Mega Games were the beginning of the end for Imagine, and the company collapsed spectacularly during the Summer of 1984. This was almost a year before the launch of ZZAP!64, but *Psyclapse* caused such a stir (stink) in the industry that its name was mentioned in some early issues (such as issue 4's interview with Denton Designs). Although dismissed as vapourware,



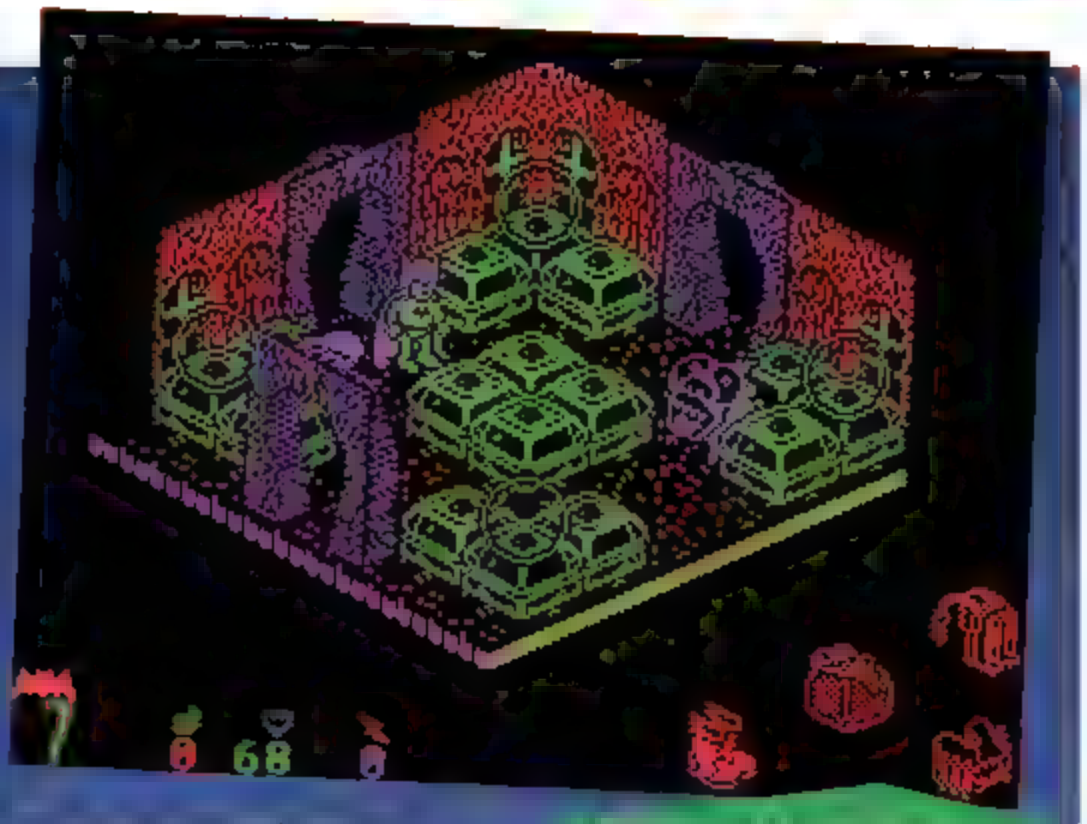
Imagine splurged advertising when it was going out of fashion, here game designers including John Gibson (left centre) and Eugene Evans (right centre) ponder the the nightmare they were really facing.

...and if they weren't enough, Imagine brought in the 'B Team'.

Imagine coders Eugene Evans and Jake Glover did start work on the game, supported by several graphics artists. Evans has since revealed that a sci-fi backstory was written, involving galactic warriors in a fight to the death on an alien planet, and the gameplay was a mix of exploration and combat. Evans also confirms that there was 'stuff on screen', namely some large, well-animated character graphics. One of these graphics was later discovered on a development disk that Stuart

BAT MAN

THE VIGILANTE OF GOTHAM CITY



Before *Head Over Heels*, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond created another joyous isometric adventure based on the *Batman* TV series from the 1960s. This was released for most 8-bit computers, including the Spectrum, MSX and Amstrad CPC. Hell, even the Amstrad PCW word processor thing [*wasn't it called Joyce? —Ed*] received a version. But what about the C64? It was revealed in our May 1986 issue that the game was Batwinging its way to the machine. Obviously that never happened and we sadly missed out on a truly excellent title. We asked Jon Ritman about this proposed C64 version and he has no memories of it, revealing that *Head Over Heels* and *Match Day II* were the first of his Ocean games to be seriously considered for the C64 (the original *Match Day* was converted, but let's pretend that never happened). This wouldn't be the last time Bat fans would miss out – more on that later.

Fotheringham auctioned off in 2005, and this is probably all we'll ever glimpse of this much-vaunted Mega Game. ***Next!***

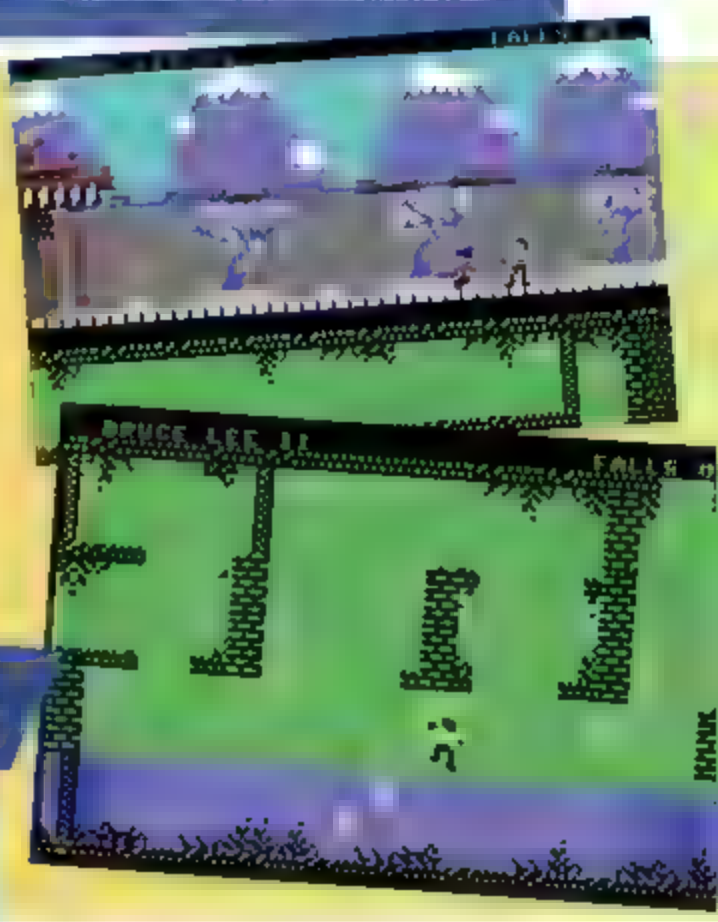
PSYCLAPSE & BANDERSNATCH

Bandersnatch was the game's sister title for the Sneccy. That never made it either.

The 'hero' character from the game, as confirmed by Eugene Evans.

BRUCE LEE II

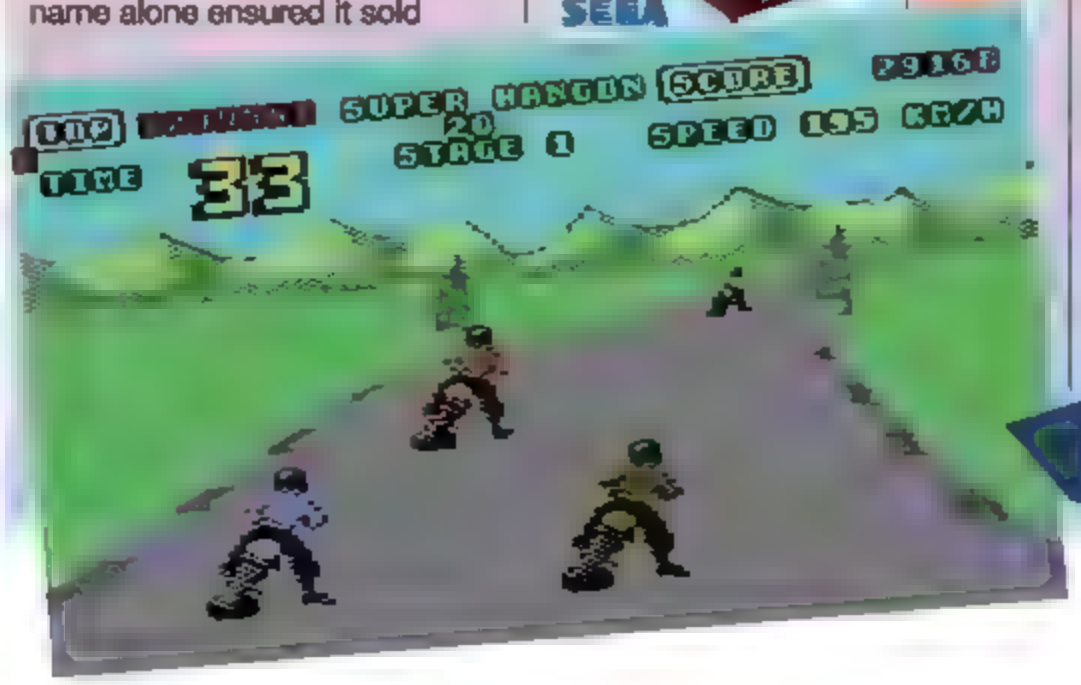
Bruce Lee was a classic from the BZ (Before ZZAP!) era. Running and jumping and kicking fat Yamo in the face. Brilliant. The game was a huge hit in Europe which prompted Datasoft to consider a follow-up – albeit one that would be quite different to the original. Speaking in issue 13, Datasoft big shot Sam Poole said: 'It will be a full role-playing adventure and have strong hi-res graphics and animation sequences, but taking advantage of some of the techniques we've developed in AR [Alternate Reality].' The sequel was subtitled *Enter The Dragon*, but *Exit The Dragon* might have been more appropriate as nothing more was heard of the game. Bruce did finally return in 2015 when Bruno Marcos's homebrew PC sequel was converted to the C64 by Jonas Hulten. If you were a fan of the original then you should track it down with lightning speed.



Years later Bruce resumed battle in this faithful fan sequel.

SUPER ENDURO RACER

If you remember Activision's *Enduro Racer* conversion you probably wish you could forget it. It was terrible and fully deserved the 13% it received from ZZAP! Yet as with many coin-op conversions, the name alone ensured it sold well despite a critical drubbing. And lo and behold, Activision decided that a second trip to the well was in order. 'Activision is releasing an improved version of its undeserved bestseller *Enduro Racer*,' we revealed in the December 1987 issue. Then nothing more was heard until the version randomly appeared on a Beau Jolly compilation. This appeared to be the result of some mastering mishap as it was clearly unfinished. It was revealed that Nick 'Orlando' Pelling was behind the game, and it was to be a disk-only release aimed primarily at the US market. Right now it's not clear why it was never properly finished.

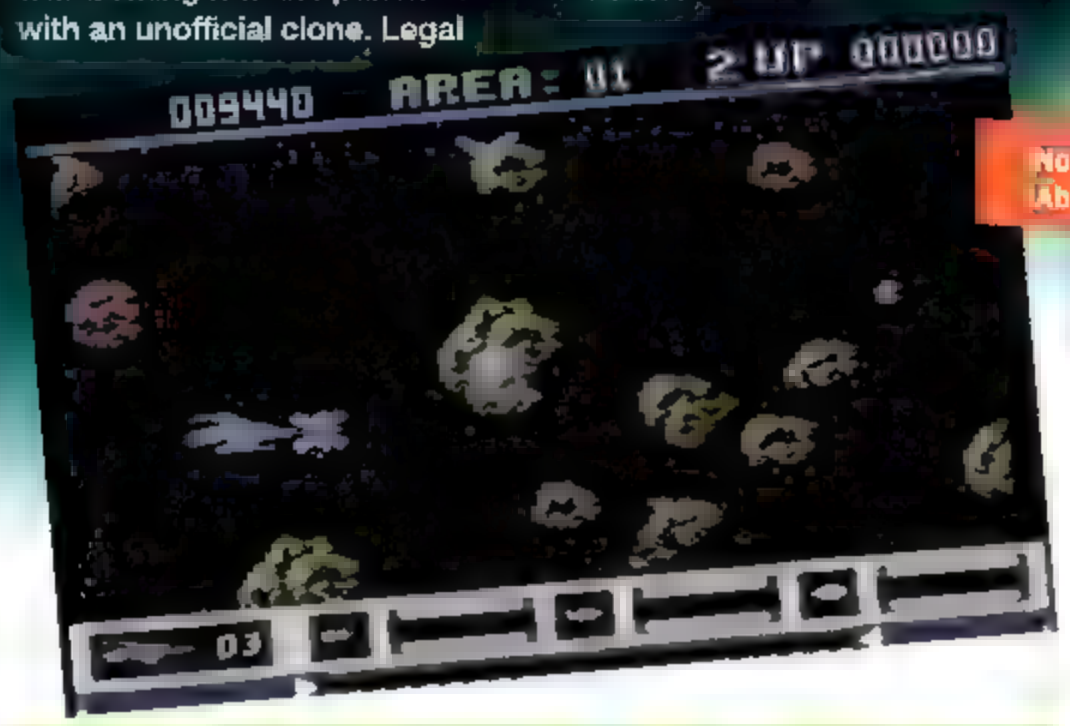


At least we're now able to test drive this superior version.

ZZAPED into Oblivion!

KATAKIS

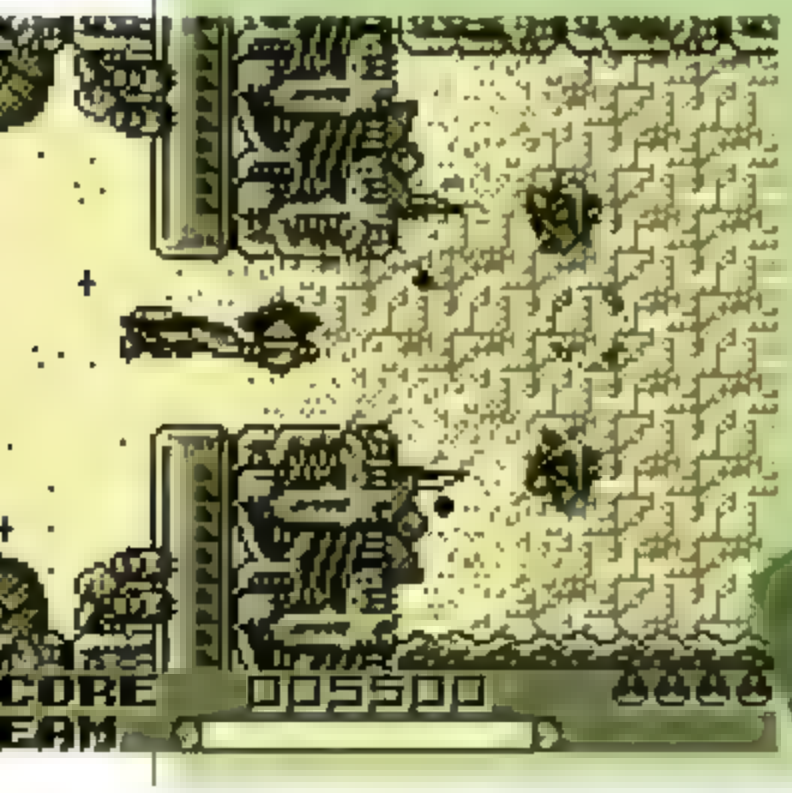
ZZAP! readers will know all about this game from shooter supremo Manfred Tranz as it was blazed across the cover of issue 42 (Oct 1988). Inside the mag the game Sizzled with a 93% overall score. 'At present the best *R-Type* variant on the 64,' summarised the review – and that was the entire problem. It transpired that Activision had licensed the *R-Type* arcade game and wasn't thrilled that US Gold was beating it to the punch with an unofficial clone. Legal muscles were flexed, US Gold conceded and the game was withdrawn two weeks before it was due to go on sale. Worse for ZZAP!, a playable demo was to be included on that month's covertape and it had to be swapped out at the last second for the crusty (though oddly compelling) *Time Tunnel*. However, *Katakis* was released in Germany, and later on a modified version was released elsewhere under the title *Denaris*.



Nothing like *R-Type* at all. Absolutely not, Your Honour.

R-TYPE II

One outcome of the whole *Katakis* debacle is that Manfred Tranz was enlisted by Activision to code the official C64 conversion of *R-Type*. It was evidently a rushed job and received 72% in ZZAP!, with Kati Hamza going for the jugular, writing 'Unfortunately it's not as good as the "certain other" game (you know what I'm talking about).' Activision was clearly undeterred, however, and snapped up in the rights to the arcade sequel We reported in our December 1990 issue that the game was in line for a C64 conversion, but at some point those plans evidently changed. Meanwhile the game was converted to the Amiga, Atari ST and, surprisingly, the Game Boy. The GB version was programmed by Bob Pape who's since told us that in all his communications with Activision, the topic of *R-Type 2* for 8-bit home computers was never raised once. It's highly likely this space shooter never got off the ground

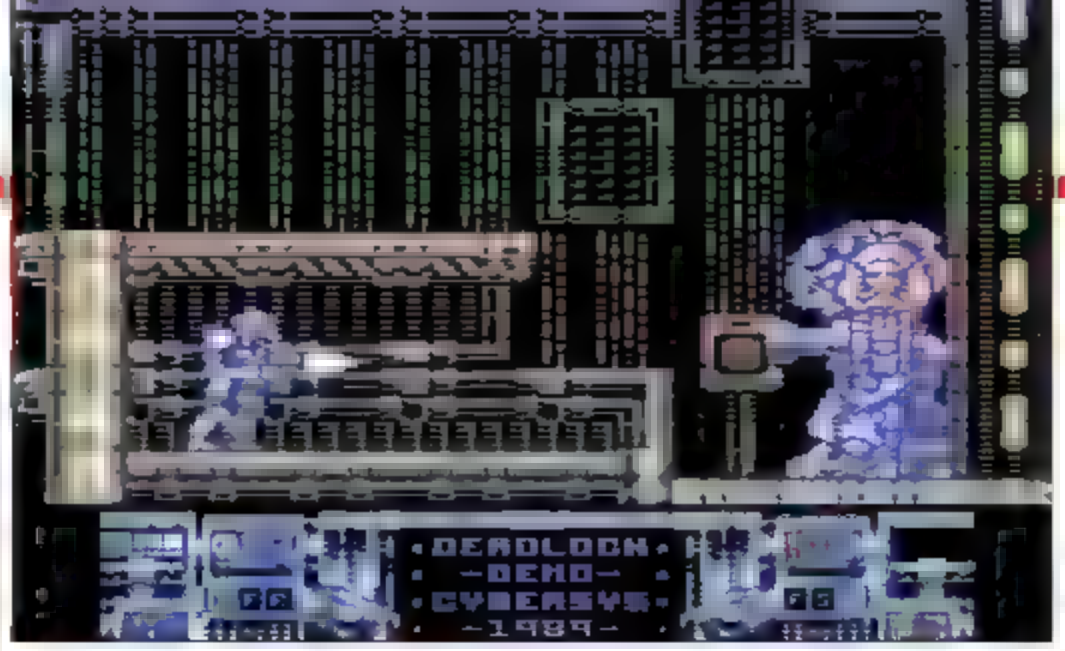


If the Game Boy could handle *R-Type 2* then surely the C64 would have had no issues.

SEARCH FOR SHARLA

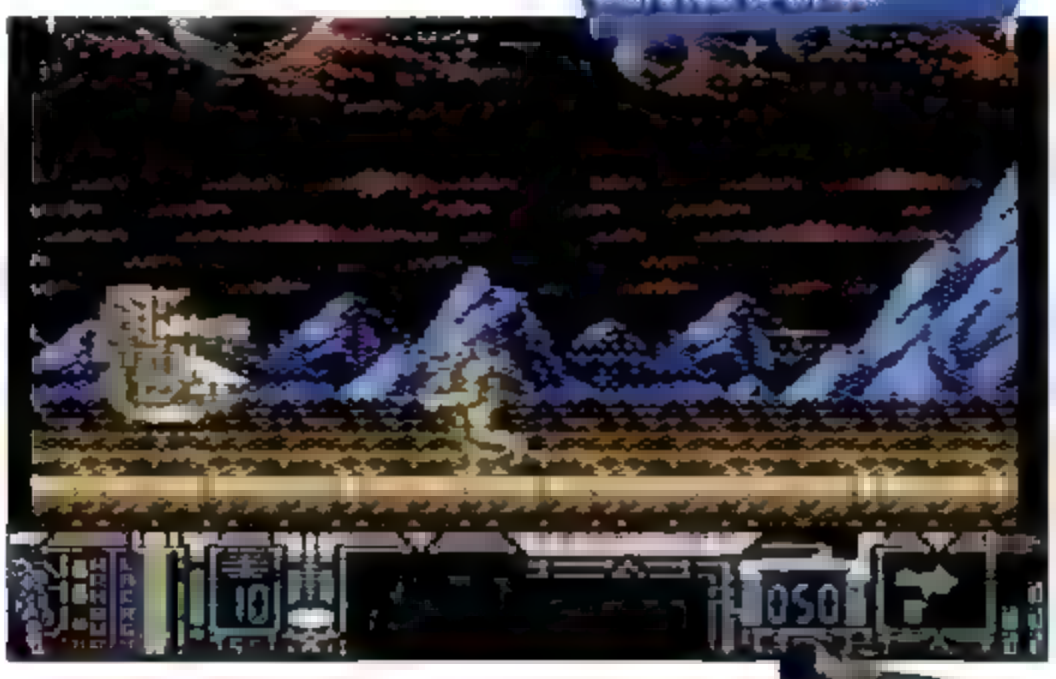
Fans of Mike Singleton's *Lords of Midnight* games were surely looking forward to this 'epic' adventure, particularly as the third game in Mike's Midnight trilogy, *The Eye Of The Moon*, never materialised. Sadly *Sharla* suffered the same fate and the game never saw the light of day on any format. Several teaser ads featuring Oli Frey's artwork ran in ZZAP!64 and other mags, but sources close to Thalamus reveal that the development dragged on and never really got anywhere. In the end the publisher decided to cut its losses and cancel the project. Efforts to source the work that was done on the C64 version have proven unsuccessful, but the guys at GTW64 did manage to recreate the end sequence based on an original image contributed by Steve Rowlands. It seems highly likely that nothing more remains of *Sharla*. Call off the search!

The end sequence found and restored.

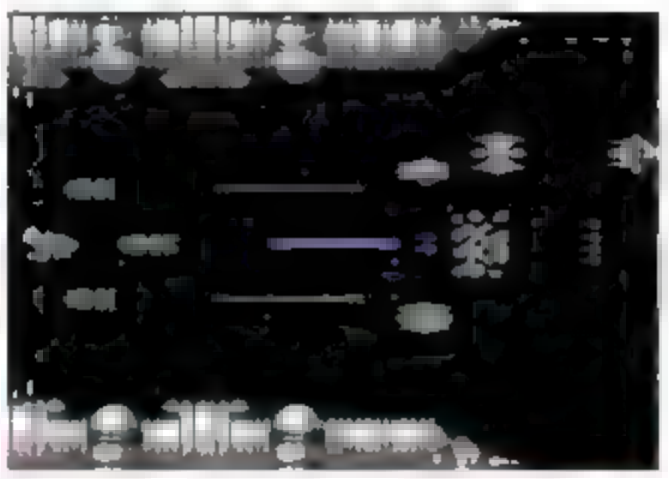


DEADLOCK

Immediately after the release of its amazing debut *Armalyte*, Cyberdyne Systems began work on this ambitious action game that was eventually picked up for publication by System 3. According to coder Dan Phillips, who spoke at length to ZZAP! in 1990, the team worked on it for around four months and produced a demo which was visually stunning. However it proved to be a case of style over substance and the gameplay was lacking. Or as Dan put it: '[It was] totally crap.' Several more months were spent trying in vain to fix it before the team was enlisted to help out on *Last Ninja III*. Despite plans to return to *Deadlock*, the game was shelved for good and it wasn't until 2003 that we finally got to experience previews thanks to the efforts of the GTW64 team and the generosity of Dan Phillips.



This one is closely related to *Deadlock*. While work on that title was floundering, Cyberdyne and Thalamus hatched a plan to produce a sequel to its mega popular shooter. Speaking to ZZAP! in the Christmas 1990 issue, Cyberdyne's Dan Phillips was clearly buzzing about the project: 'The weaponry is going to be the biggest change of all, there's going to be a shop at the start . . . the aliens will have a lot more character about them, a bit more intelligence . . . it'll be bigger, look better and play better.' Robin Hogg suggested that *Armalyte 2* would likely be 'THE shoot-'em-up of 1991' and few would argue with that.

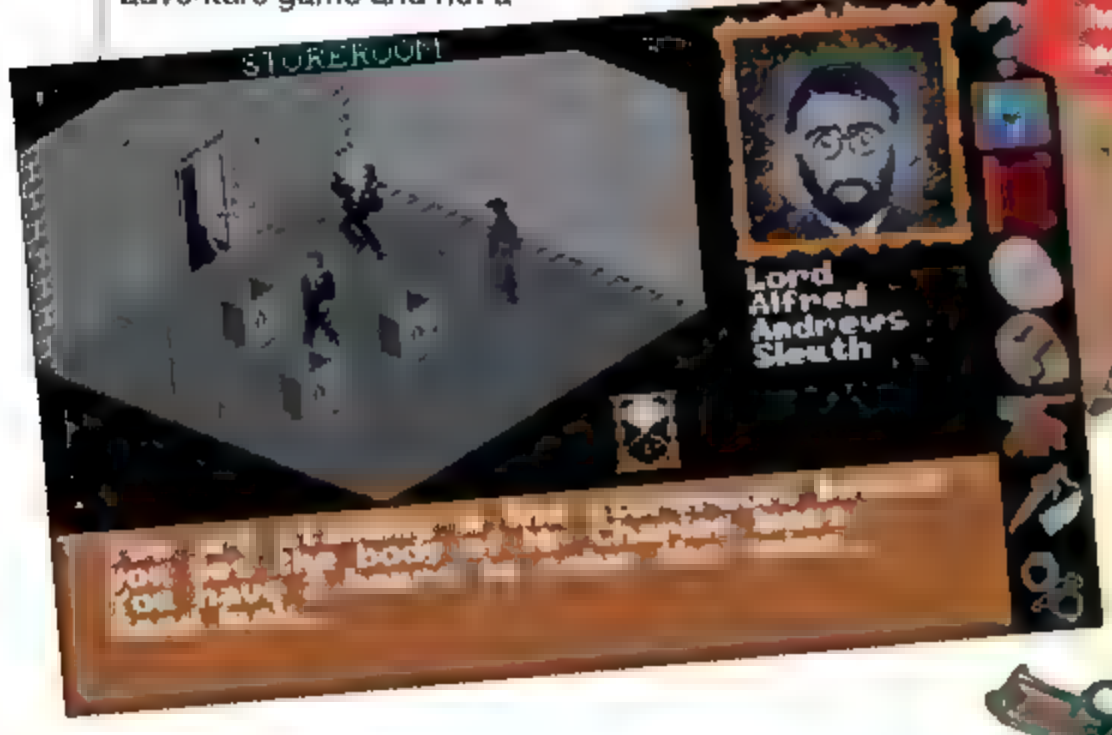


But the game's artist and designer Robin Levy was seconded to *Last Ninja III* so the development stalled and never progressed beyond a series of impressive demos. These have since been secured by GTW64, allowing us to glimpse what might have been.

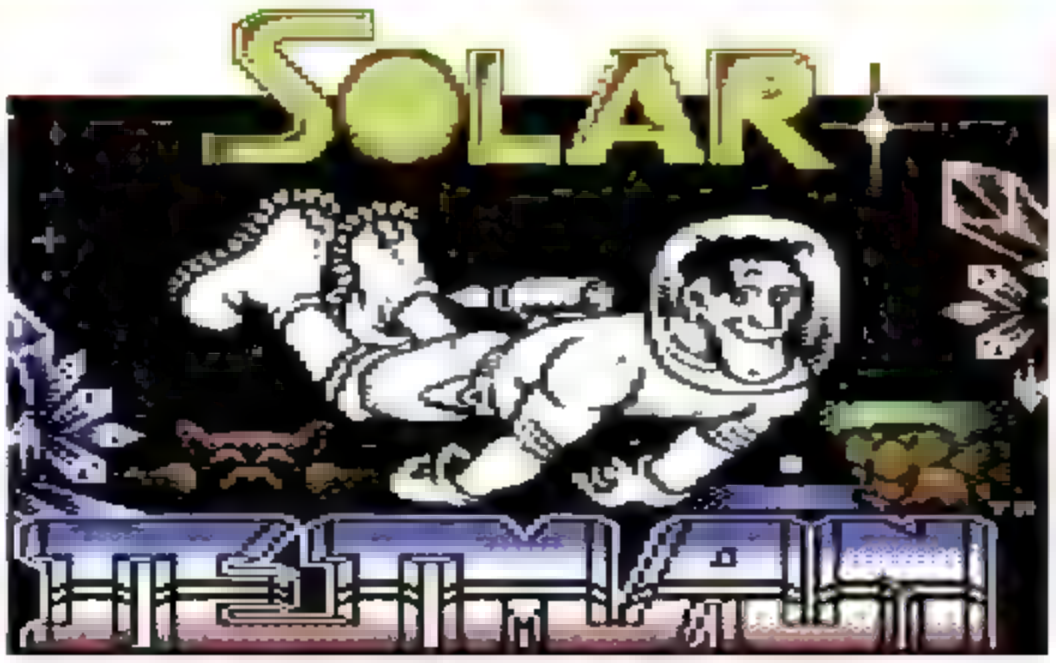
MURDER!

When you consider some of the absolute dross that US Gold put out in the later years – *Line of Fire*, *Final Fight*, we're looking at you – it makes you wonder how a cover-game that received 93% in the September 1990 issue somehow failed to get released, despite multiple sources confirming that it was finished. The answer, it seems, is because *Murder!* was a challenging, icon-driven adventure game and not a coin-op conversion or licensed property. Reports suggest that the lead 16-bit version sold very nearly three copies, so US Gold decided to cut its losses and cancel the C64 game. As such we were denied the chance to play a game which Phil King called 'a seriously brilliant concept, perfectly implemented'.

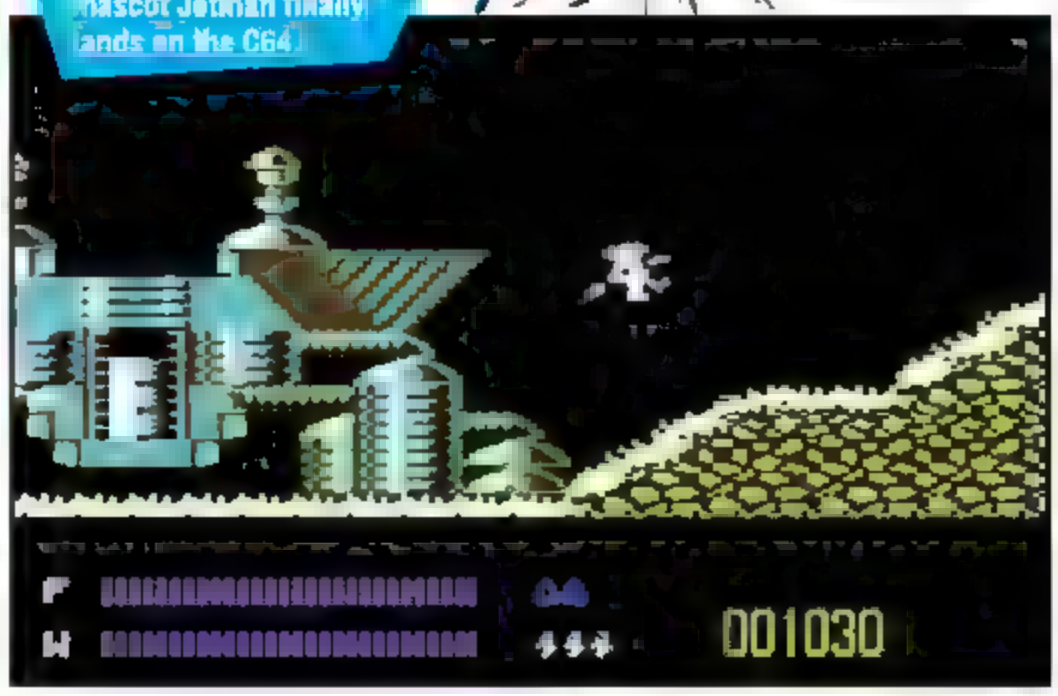
Determined attempts to find the game by GTW64 have so far turned up nowt, so for now this mystery remains unsolved.



SOLAR JETMAN



When it comes to repeated no-shows on the C64, Ultimate's Jetman character has to hold the record. His first game *Jetpac* was supposed to be 64-bound. Never happened. It was same story with the follow-up, *Lunar Jetman*. And would you believe it, the third game, *Solar Jetman*, was in development by Software Creations (as teased in ZZAP!) and that too never achieved escape velocity. Jetman clearly needed a break, and this happened in 2012 when GTW64 managed to source the original development disks. It turns out that the game was fully finished and actually rather good. The problem was that the original NES version didn't exactly set the sales charts on fire. Rather than risk a costly failure, publisher Sales Curve decided to cancel the game on all computer formats. Such a shame, but at least Jetman did make it to the C64 . . . eventually.



PARASOL STARS

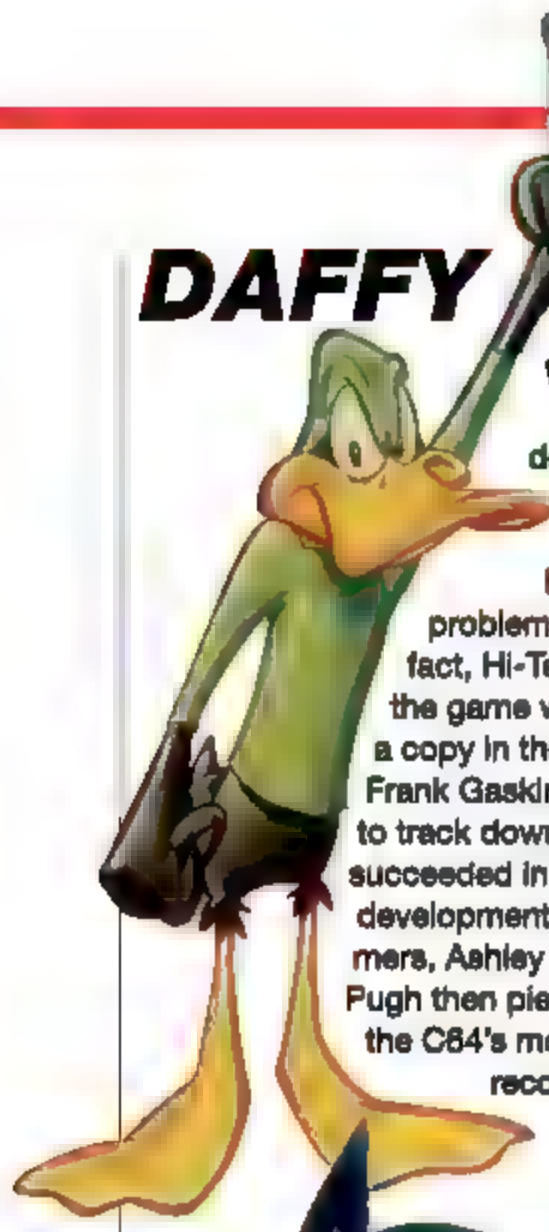
Although this was the third Bub and Bob adventure, Ocean billed it as *Rainbow Islands 2* to capitalise on the success of its earlier conversion. And while the umbrella antics lacked the sheer fun of the previous games, it was shaping up to be one of the most anticipated releases during the C64's twilight years. Then disaster struck!

In issue 87 we reported that the programmer's house had been burgled and the development disks had been nicked. That wasn't exactly true, as it later transpired that the programmer was Colin Porch (*Operation Wolf*, *Gryzor*) and his partner at the time had trashed his disks in a fit of pique. Either way the game was gone and Ocean wasn't willing to allow Colin to start over. He recalls that the conversion was shaping nicely so this is definitely one of the most regrettable entries.

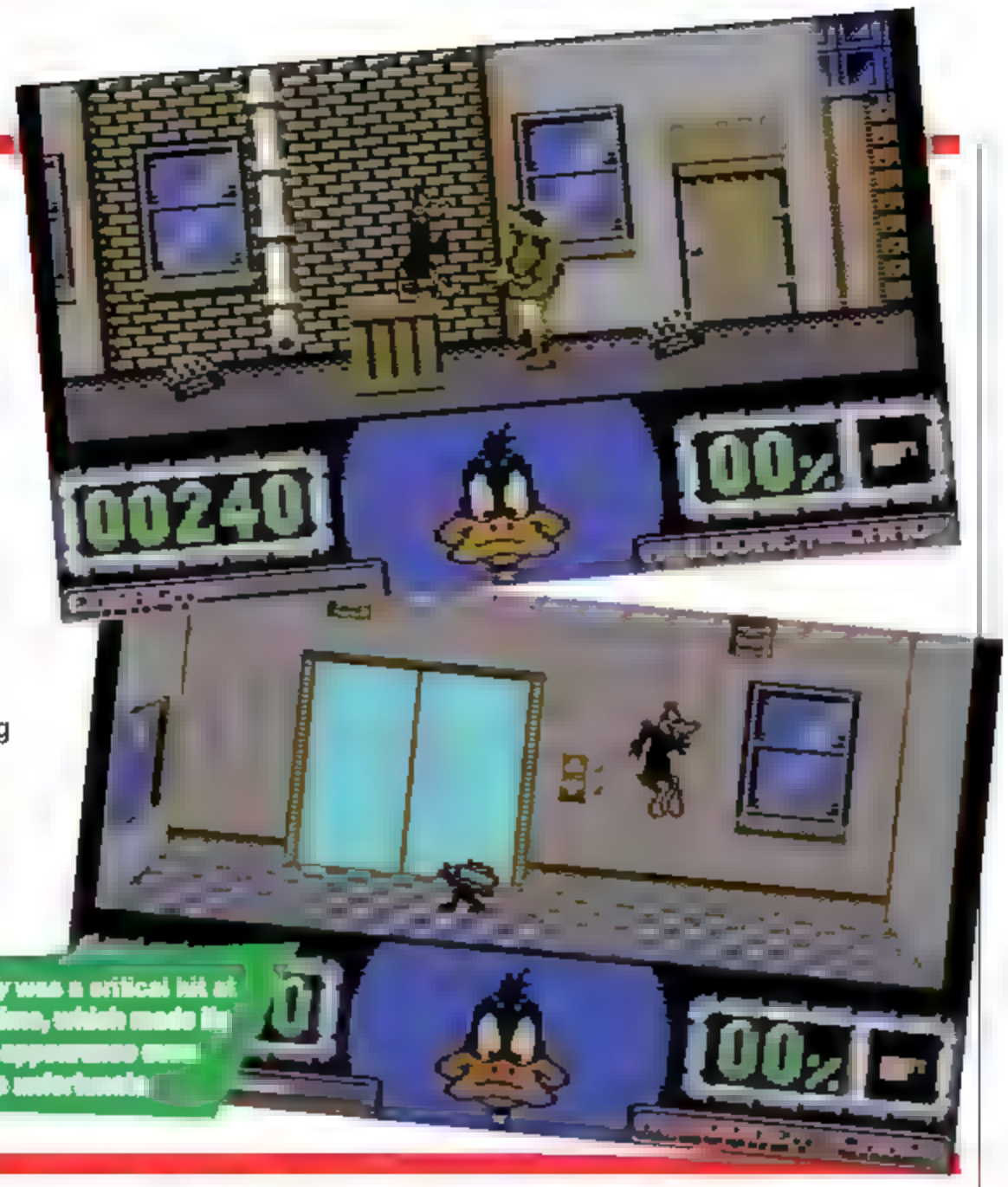
CHUCK ROCK

As unreleased titles go *Chuck Rock* must rank as one of the most perplexing. Core's prehistoric platformer had already been a big hit on 16-bit machines and the gameplay seemed like a good fit for the C64. What's more, ZZAP! awarded the game a 96% Gold Medal review in the July 1992 issue. Mark 'Corky' Caswell called it 'a classic and no mistake'. Print adverts were run, carrying the line 'Now available on C64!', but then for reasons that are not entirely clear (probably something to do with 'market conditions'), publisher Core abruptly decided to cancel the game. All was not lost however, as *Chuck Rock*'s Italian development team struck a deal with Core to release the game in their home country. So the game is definitely out there – although finding a physical copy may prove tricky/expensive

DAFFY DUCK



Where's *Daffy*? That's a question that has puzzled ZZAP! fans for decades. This budget gem from Hi-Tec Software was reviewed in our August 1992 issue where it received a very healthy 94%. But then Hi-Tec hit financial problems and the game never made it to retail. In fact, Hi-Tec boss Dave Palmer later revealed that the game was never mastered, so hopes of finding a copy in the wild were dashed. Undeterred, GTW's Frank Gasking spent 18 years (***eighteen years!***) trying to track down the game's source, and he eventually succeeded in 2015 when he managed to obtain the development disks from one of the games programmers, Ashley Routledge (of Ash & Dave fame). Martin Pugh then pieced together the source files and one of the C64's most coveted titles was finally recovered. Huzzah! The *Daffy Duck* saga shows that we should never give up the search.



Daffy was a critical hit at the time, which made its non-appearance even more mysterious.

BATMAN RETURNS

The Amiga version (seen here) deserved to be thrown off the highest spire of Gotham Cathedral.

Ocean's game based on the 1989 *Batman* movie was a smash hit across all formats, but by the time *Batman Returns* hit cinemas in 1992, the only viable 8-bit computer for a tie-in was the C64. Everything was looking extremely promising. The game was being developed by cult coders Denton Designs and during 1993 we even started up a diary feature to give readers a glimpse of the game's development. It appeared to be progressing well and then . . . the lead Amiga version was released and it was a disaster; a complete bomb. The problem was that the C64 was very closely based on the Amiga version, so its fate was sealed. Programmer Roy Bannon has revealed that the first two (of five) levels were complete when the plug was pulled, and all the development work is now long gone.

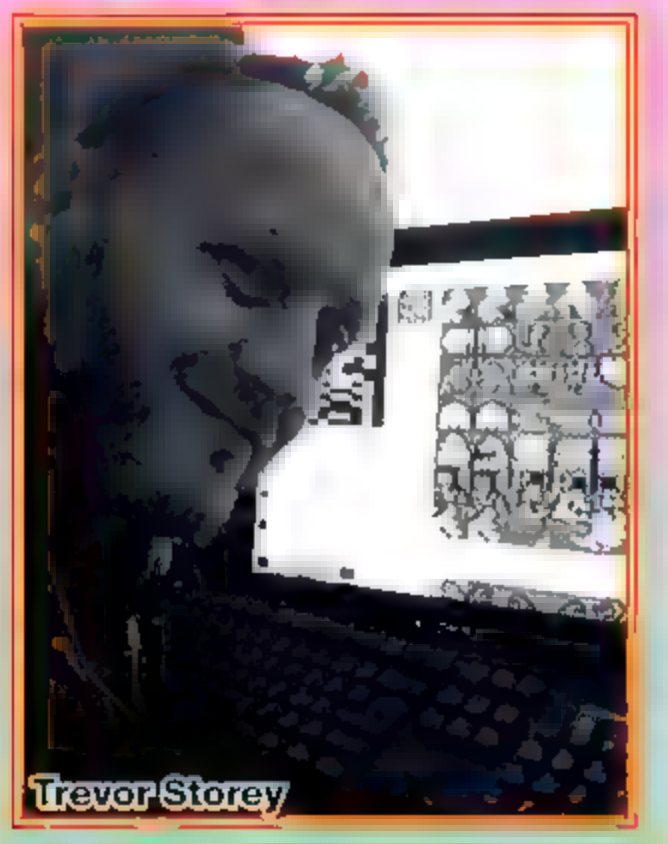
LAST NINJA IV

In our Autumn 1993 issue Kay Arnesen wrote in and asked a very important question. 'Is *Last Ninja IV* coming out on the C64?' At the time ol' Mangram scratched his noggin and replied: 'As far as we know there have been no plans.' Well now we can reveal that there were indeed plans afoot to continue the series. The venerable Jon Wells (*Sceptre Of Baghdad*) developed some demos which gave Armakuni more freedom to interact with the game world – and even annoy the park warden by stepping onto the grass! Around 1994 Jon presented his demos to System 3 but they weren't interested in having one last fling with the C64. As a result Jon shelved this promising project for good. So in a roundabout way, Kay, the answer you've waited a full quarter-century to hear is . . . er, 'no'.

ZZAP! FEATURE

Retro Fusion Books' publisher CHRIS WILKINS is well known for his rational, level-headed, sensible thinking [*...really? —ED*], so what the hell was he thinking of, coming up with the notion of getting some of the industry's best-known developers to create a new game specially for the ZZAP!64 2019 Annual? Well... TREVOR STOREY, STUART COLLIER and SAUL CROSS accepted the challenge, and this is their diary of...

The Making of... SIZZLER


Trevor Storey

Stuart Collier

Saul Cross

25 / 02 / 2018 — Trev

Today I had a message from Chris Wilkins asking if we could possibly do a game for his ZZAP!64 Annual Kickstarter, with a release date around September/October. After a short chinwag with Stuart Collier and Saul Cross we all agreed. Chris wants it to have something to do with creating a game and getting a ZZAP!64 Sizzler . . . so I begin designing.

26/ 02 / 2018 — Trev

Art wise I had the idea of bright bold and colourful, Turbo or a Sprites style.

For the main character I wanted something different so after a bit of playing around I came up with a three-legged robot. This went through a few wee changes until I was finally happy with two hi-res sprites overlaying one expanded mc-sprite.

Next it was time to animate him – and trust me, it isn't easy animating a three-legged creature in C64 resolution. So after the walk, idle, climb, jump and duck animations were complete I could move onto the enemy sprites.

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27 / 02 / 2018 — Trev

It's always fun doing enemy sprites. I wanted them all to carry on the black outline theme. I looked at some NES/SNES games to get a few more ideas then got stuck in. We also wanted the team and two ZZAP! reviewers to appear in the game, so to get a likeness I did these as a hi-res sprite overlaying an mc-sprite.

Sent Saul a message asking for something Turbo or a Sprites-like for the game music.

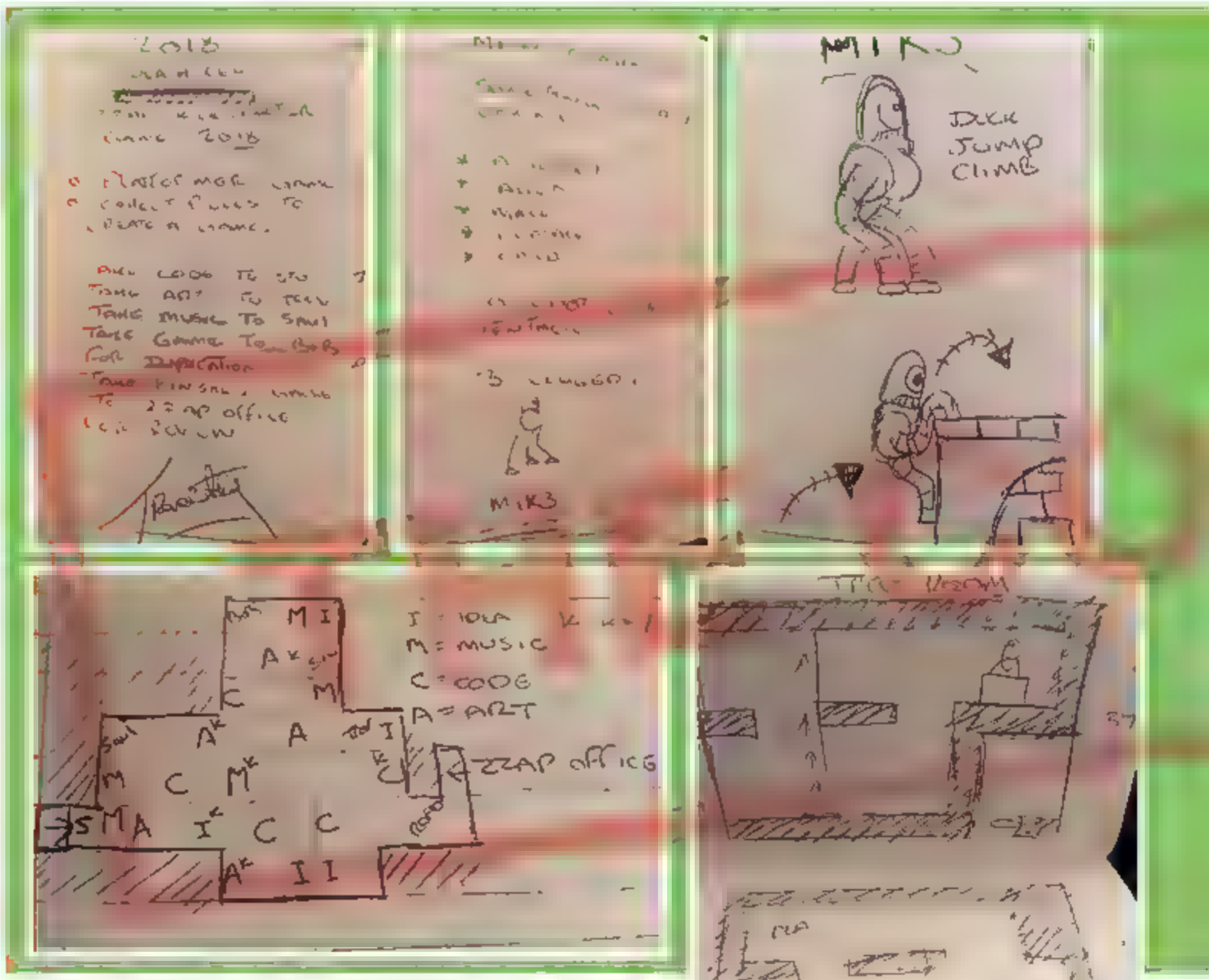
Finished the game design; I think should be a fun project.

---

28 / 02 / 2018 — Trev

The snow is still crrrrazey outside so another night in. Worked on the first charset [character set], added conveyors, springs, fans and deathblocks. Again stuck with the black outline cartoon feel.

Created a couple of mockups of how the game will look; pretty pleased with how it's turning out so far.



Saul emailed me an early version of the game music. So far it sounds just how I hoped it would.

Time to design the first part of the map, 51 rooms split across two charsets. The second charset will be used for the ZZAP! offices as I want a big ZZAP 64 logo on the back wall.

28 / 02 / 2018 — Saul

Okay, had a message from Trev about the music for Sizzler, 'Make it Jolly and bouncy – think THING ON A SPRING', he said. Jolly and bouncy – not my usual thing, but had a think about it and was listening to BRICK ENGLAND, by Jean Michael Jarre and Pet Shop Boys and the main riff from this put an idea in my head.

I made a start on the initial in-game tune based on that idea, a similar riff but with a more bouncy bass line to get started. I then sent the initial germ of the idea to Trev for a quick critique.

Now I need a list of all the music and sound effects requirements for the game and then I can get started on the rest of it.

---

01 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Back to the map editor, 44 rooms done, seven to go, also been working out where to place doors/keys.

Sat and thought about the end screen, decided to go with a ZZAP! style review look, some fake text with reviewer heads and an overall score. If the player gets 90% he receives a Sizzler – thus the name of the game.

Created the charset and got it into the editor. Done and dusted. Time to get back to the map and charsets. Created the second charset for the ZZAP offices, included the ZZAP!64 logo with THING, ROCKFORD and GRIBBLY visible in the background.

The ZZAP! offices will only be two screens so I can lavish most of the chars on the ZZAP logo etc.

Mockup of ZZAP! office created . . . yes that'll do nicely

---

02 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Time to start getting the map into the editor, first two rooms are in and looking nice and colourful.

I tend to get the rooms in fairly quickly so I have the basic maze done, then I'll start adding the conveyers, springs, fans etc

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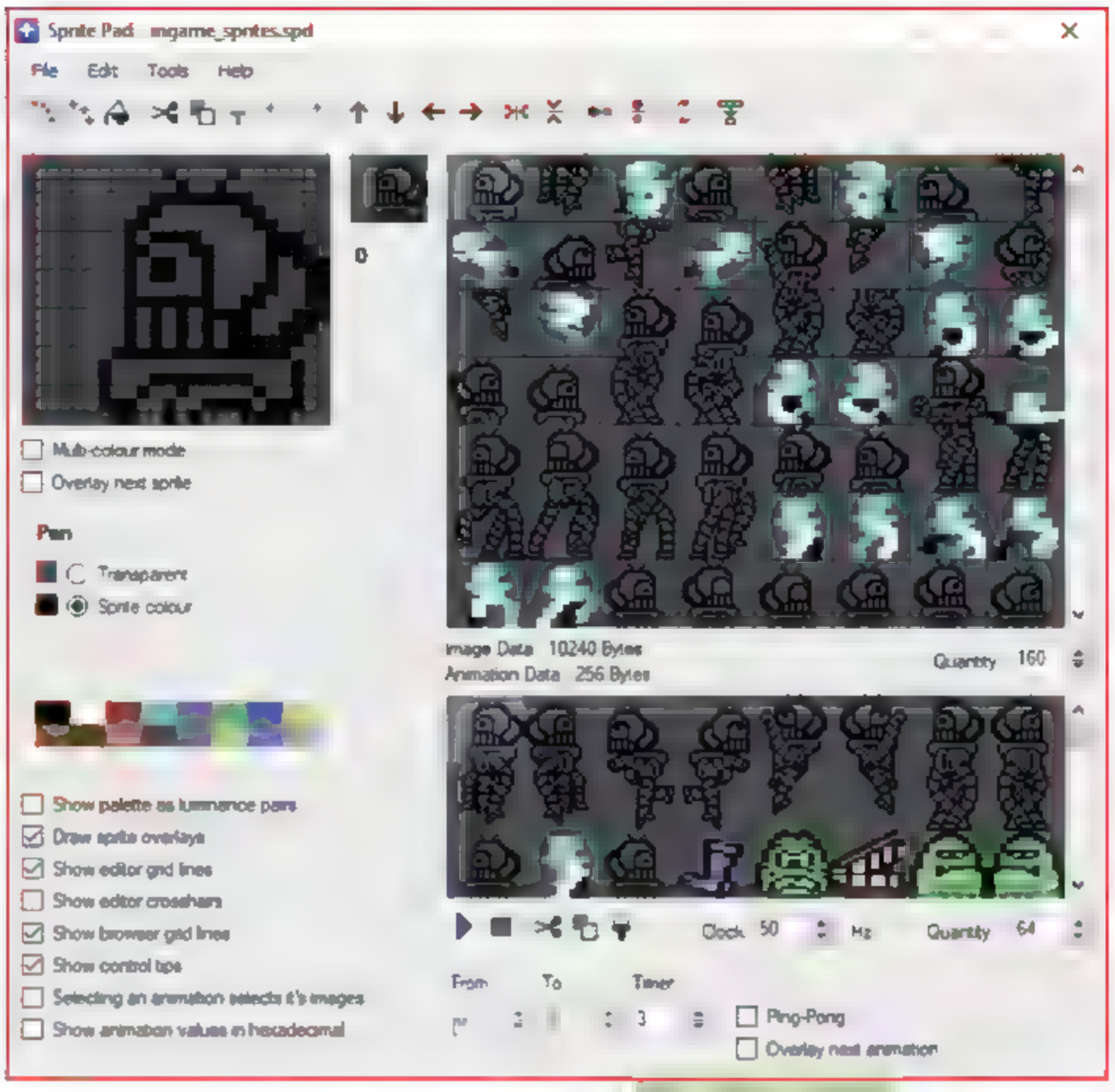
03 / 03 / 2018 — Saul

I just got the list of music and sound effects requirements from Trev, so now I can get on with the rest of the tunes. I often do two voice tunes for



Keeping the 'black outline cartoon feel' – working in the sprite editor (above).

Below: pages from Trev's notebook sketches showing the development of three-legged robot MiK3's character; detail of the ZZAP! office (note Jaz Rignall's desk), monitors, a fanciful Ludlow High Street and (bottom right) two screens from the editor, compiling some of the physical elements, particularly the 'fans'.

in-game to allow for sound effects to play, but there aren't too many sound effects for Sizzler and Trevor has asked for three voices throughout. This is good in this case because it makes it easier to do things with counterpoint and syncopation, which is much better for getting that 'bounce' in.

03 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Made a start on the game framework. I have quite a few routines that can be simply imported into each game I do: ranges from sprite collisions; level loading; drawing screens; random number generator; etc. After the first two hours the framework is complete and my project can now be worked on.

My shared Dropbox folder was full of Trevor's work, so I set about compressing the media and adding them to the project. Ten minutes later the first of the rooms were loading to the screen. Job done for the first night.

Must get Trev to mark the parts in the character set, get him to try and keep them in groups (which makes detection sooo much easier and in less code).

So with room drawing code done, next is coding the main sprite to get him walking and climbing, as I can see that Trevor has also drawn all the sprites already. They look pretty smart!

04 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Created a list of what chars do what and how they animate for Stu, hopefully it all makes sense.

A few beers and a bit of tuck consumed . . back to the map editor for an hour or two, 16 rooms done 35 to go.

04 / 03 / 2018 — Saul

Completed the in-game tune and started work on the title tune; a short high energy number to loop after a minute or so. Goattracker is great for many things but lacks some editing features that would make this so much easier as it can be a pain sometimes trying to shift things around in key within a single pattern.

To get the energy up in the title tune I really want to have a lot going on too, which involve careful planning of how to interleave instruments on each voice to get a really dynamic mix of rhythm and harmonic changes going. It's also hard working this out so that such a short loop (60-90 seconds) can be played over and over without getting boring or annoying.

05 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Animations added, already looking like a game!

Few emails with Trev on how he was expecting the animations to look (and which frames do what).

06 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Reached the halfway point of the map, used the spare chars to create some non-colliding walls and pipes for secret passages.

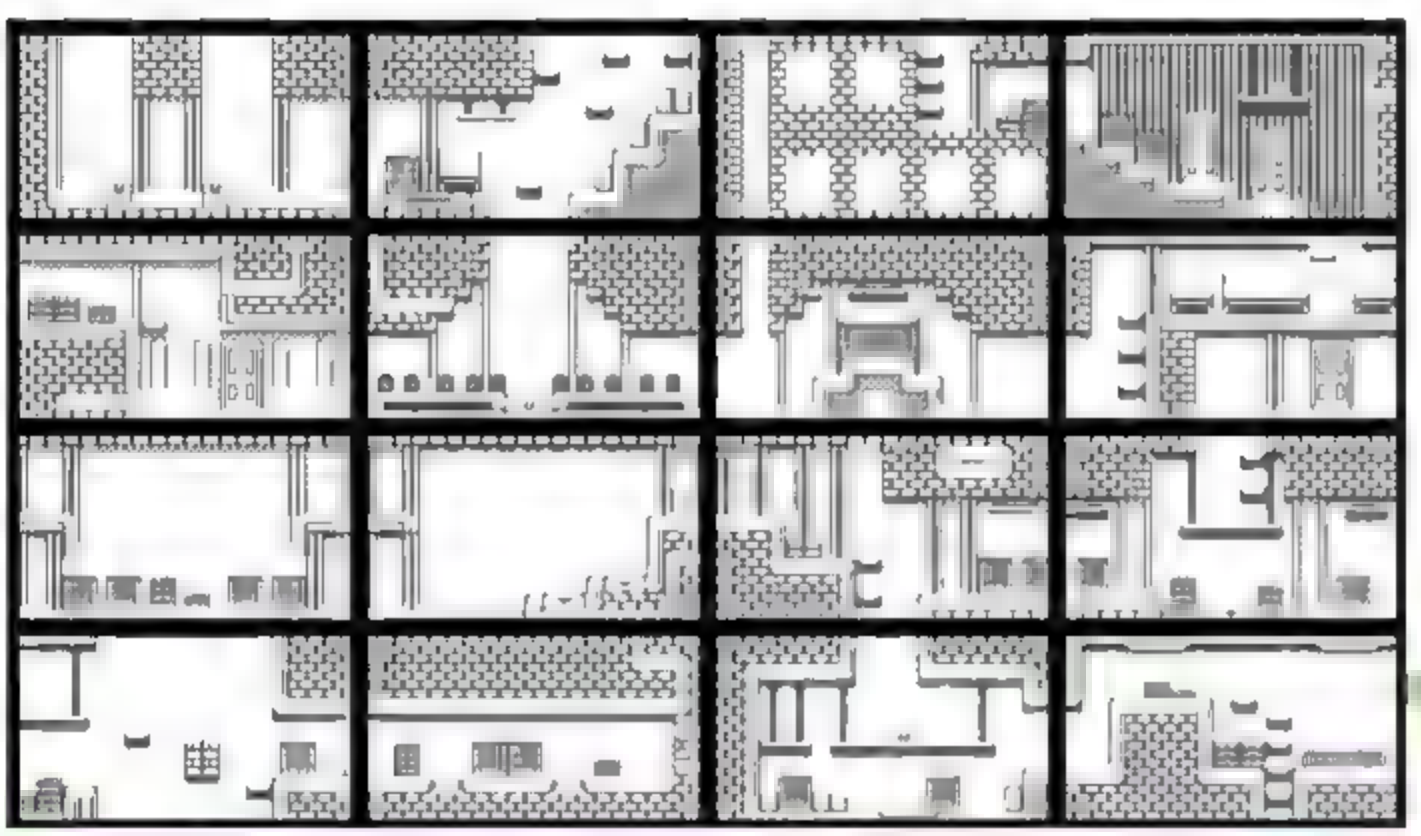
07 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Spent the day designing the box art. wanted to have the Imagine/Ocean-style feel which will fit the game perfectly.

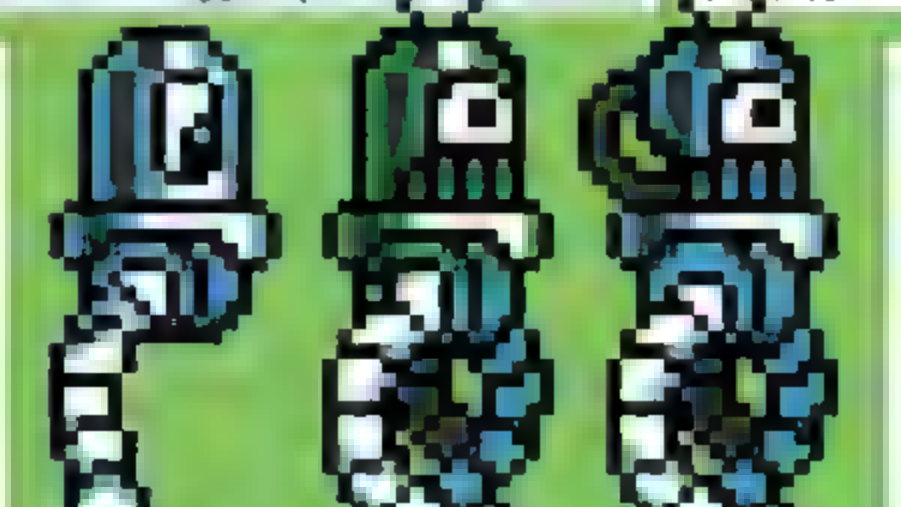
08 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Took the sketches I did for the cover and did a quick layout. After a bit of fiddling and moving things around I found the layout I was happy with.

Spent a few hours colouring and drawing it out, grabbed the Sizzler logo from Chris Wilkins for the cover too. Finished.



Left: mapping out the game screens.
Below: sketch for the loading screen and derived from it an outline version of the box inlay art.



11 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Collision detection put in so that the main character can now walk around happily (and Jump — indeed duck). It also interacts with the conveyors, wind tunnel and collapsing tiles. This 'framework' can be used on other projects since it is written to be very modular, but of course can be tweaked when (and if) we start testing the map rooms.

Being part of a team with two who are working in remote locations, sometimes leads to open questions and interpretation. Currently

'A bit of a mad idea ..' a little demo to feature the heads of Trev, Stu and Saul opening and closing their mouths. Above right: robot concepts.

waiting on the ledge 'grab' and climb as its not obvious from the map which ledges are reachable.

12 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

First pass of the map is now done. Time to go back through and add more details to some of the rooms that look a bit sparse. Also made a start on the loading pic

Spent a few hours doing the loading pic, finding the layout that worked well took me a good hour or so. Eventually decided on having the characters one side and a large Sizzler logo on the other side, sorted.

12 / 03 / 2018 — Saul

Put the finishing touches to the title tune and tweaked some instruments. but now have a bit of a mental block trying to come up with something for the game-complete and game-over tunes. In some ways shorter tunes are harder to get right because they have to stand up potentially to being repeated.

12 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Worked on animation system for the enemies, a series of tables with min and max values. In today's terms arrays :)

14 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Today was mostly getting all the x/y coordinates for the doors and char pickups so Stu can add them easily in code. Found a few mistakes in the room linking, so did another check through to find the offending rooms.

19 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

We are now spending our time getting the controls, movement and environment interaction correct

Walking and jumping are just about spot on now; climbing needs some twiddling and environment interaction still needs some work.

When creating a map I often get the room layout done quickly then once we are happy with the controls I go back through the map and adjust where I need to, adding and removing platforms/ spikes, etc.

19 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Now happy with the main char passed it over to Trev to test. Came back mostly positive, but there are some parts to tweak (there always are)

Did some work on the title screen, a nice Sizzler logo with a selection of rooms appearing behind it. Oh and of course a scroller – has to have a scroller

Also started work on the panel. I will need to get a single routine to update the four sets of information, the more compact the code the more RAM I have left

21 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Spent a few hours going back 'n' forth with Stu tightening up the controls and fixing bugs as they came along.

We concentrated on the wind chars/jumping and grabbing edges/jumping through and landing on platform chars. Once the main controls/ collisions are all done we can move onto object/door placement.

23 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Had a bit of a mad idea to create a little demo to go with the game, it would feature the head of myself Stu and Saul representing the three audio channels. After a quick test to see how I would look as a six-sprite animated head I asked Stu and Saul to send me a short vid of themselves opening their mouths. Within hours they had sent me vids It shows how bonkers we are that we create such things so quickly haha.

23 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Trev has come up with a little demo idea, which shouldn't take long to do in code: three heads (us) responding to a music track, with a big scroller. Decided that once the gfx are done I'll make a start on it. It keeps the coding juices flowing.

24 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Having three rows of six sprites won't be possible so I'll have to either rearrange the demo or think of another way to do it.

25 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

I had the idea of making one head out of chars instead. 5x8 chars – six frames

Did a quick test and it works.

Created chars for a large font and created 4x4 tiles which will make up the 64x96 pixel font.

26 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

GFX done by Trev already so I've made a start on the multiplex sprites as we have 18 sprites in a tight area at the top of the screen. I have always been impressed by the C64 demoscene – games writing is so much easier!

27 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Well the heads are in and flicker-free onto the scroller The scroller is made up from 8x12 characters. so using the charpad, Trev has produced a nice tile set for me to use.

First thing to do is fully optimise the tiles so that I don t have to do much maths in 6502

A little NET program later and the tiles are now all arranged so that the font data is in columns

28 / 03 / 2018 — Saul

Turning my attention to the shorter tunes for the game-over and game-complete, I think I have managed to come up with tunes in keeping with the rest of the music and the tone of the game. At the same time I have tried to make the game-over tune a little melancholy and the game-complete tune a sort of bouncy tune but a wind down at the same time after the frenetic pace of the in game tune. Hopefully it all sounds good and works together well. Just a loading tune and the sfx left to do now

28 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

A little routine done that takes the columns and places them on screen once the smooth scroll area has become invisible. (Thank you Commodore for the $D016) As the data is now optimised, it means I don't have to create a separate table with the current character tiles and it's now reading directly from the fonts table. Been tweaking and optimising again (wish I could just write super optimised code in the first place LOL)

29 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

Happy C64mini day Twitter has gone into meltdown. Anything to encourage more users onto the C64 is good in my eyes. First thing I did with mine?

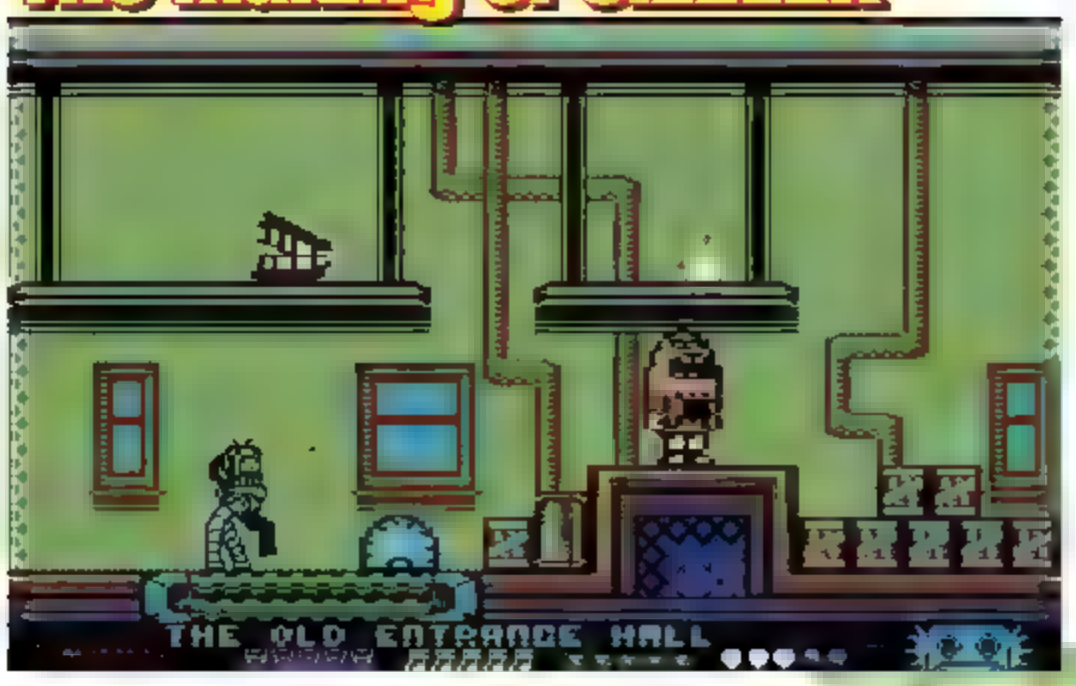
A pantheon of sprites – Enemies, Game pieces and Heroes named and shamed! (Including Pystronik's Jason 'Kenz' Mackenzie.)

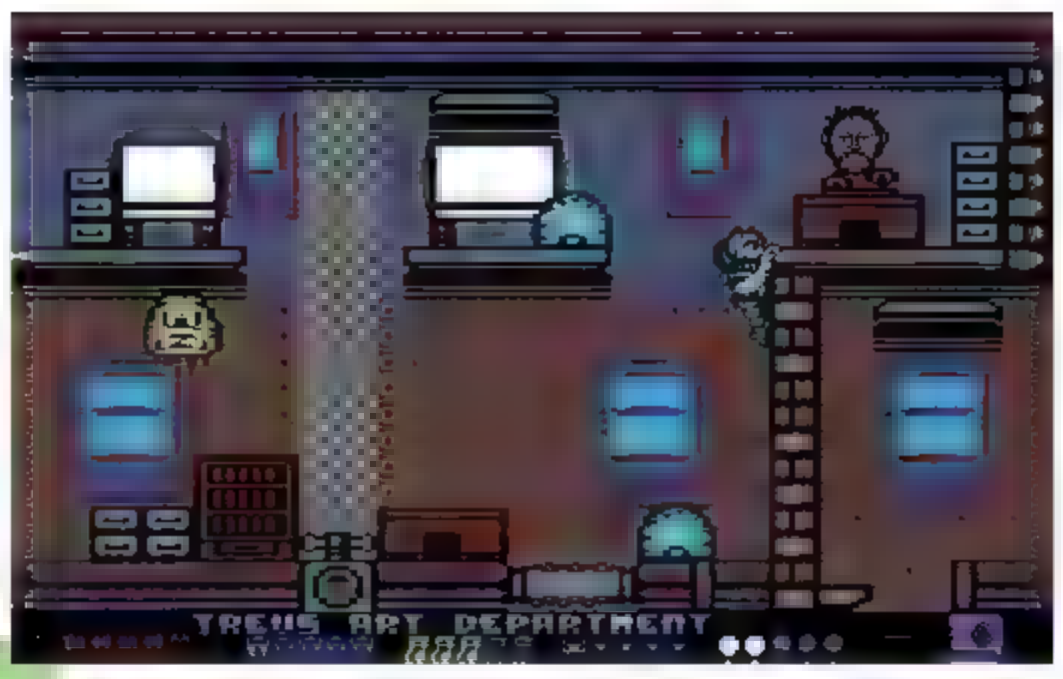
Tested to make sure our games worked of course. Unfortunately I did have to test a few of the other classic games on it, which meant ZERO coding done.

30 / 03 / 2018 — Trev

Stu has everything in for the demo and using a test SID we have the heads jabbering to the music – perfect Back to the game. We now have the player bouncing nicely on springs; next up is pickups and the team heads.

The Making of SIZZLER





30 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

The joys of Easter - two bank holidays . . . more coding time. Managed to find the part of the music routine that supplies which voice is playing and what note. A few counters and animation code and we now have three heads responding to the music being played. Sent a demo off to Saul so he can visualise what we are doing. Hopefully he can produce some music that isn't too fast as it makes the heads look like they are not animating.

First scroller text added from Trev.

31 / 03 / 2018 — Stu

As per usual, looking at code from yesterday and changing it already. I must get back onto the game code and stop tinkering with the demo.

02 / 04 / 2018 — Stu

With it raining, family duties were excused, so I had a few coding sessions. Placed all the collectables, made them collide with the main character and update the HUD at the same time

Also placed the keys, doorways and the avatars that appear at their desks. The game is definitely taking shape but I'm finding little errors with the room design as I'm testing, some rooms you can jump across and get stuck in walls.

Mik3 faces threats from a Saurus, a Gnashers and a grumpy Gump in the Old Entrance Hall, but undeterred the robot climbs up to Trev's hideaway in the Art Department – which apparently he shares with an arty Saurus or two and a Ghoul? Odd, these graphics coders . . .

Below: the critical moment, will Jaz and Roger award Mik3 a Sizzler? What does Thing think?

Will have to alert Trev

The bug list that we keep between us is now empty (which is always nice)

This week will start on the enemies.

03 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

After playing the game and looking at a few others (THING ON A SPRING for example), I feel it needs to be 200% faster Stu don't kill me :)

Also we now have the SPRING in and working, animation looks a bit odd on the SPRING so I'll adjust that.

Char pickups and keys now in.

03 / 04 / 2018 — Stu

Actually did no coding today Was invited to watch the Villa v Reading game, couldn't say no.

04 / 04 / 2018 — Stu

Trev wants to see the main character moving at double his speed. Done a quick hack to make him move double. if it stays I have to optimise the routines. The hack consists of calling the movement code twice.

05 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

Tested the player at 200% speed, still doesn't feel right – now he feels too fast. Asked Stu to put the walking speed back to what it was and leave the jump speed the same. Feels better but the jump feels too quick, so think we need somewhere between what it was and what it is now

Sorted the SPRING chars and they look better now – still not 100% happy though, so I may fiddle with it again.

05 / 04 / 2018 — Stu

Few more tweaks on the jumping Arc, death tiles are now also active.

08 / 04 / 2018 — Stu

Little family break, back onto it again now

Mapped all of the enemy animations to their internally known names Everything is driven by

tables so 'the foot' is now known as Enemy Type Zero .)

11 / 04 / 2018 — Saul

Loading music is now written - this was quite a challenge as the idea was to make something in the same vein as the old Imagine loading tunes (so a lot of Martin Galway-like pulse sweeps and arps). I also wanted to do something polyrhythmic as this would be unusual and hopefully attention grabbing. All in all it seems to have worked reasonably well (I hope).

Just the SFX left to do now. Thankfully the list for these is reasonably short. Creating SFX can be one of the hardest things to get right, as although GOATTRACKER supports them and has its own system for playing them, they rarely sound the same in the finished game. There are also some tight restrictions on what can be done in the wave and pulse tables.

13 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

Still not 100% happy with the jumping, still feels a bit too floaty. Just when Stu thinks the bug list is gone I whack up another 12 bugs . BOOM.

Received music/SFX from Saul today, they sound great, especially the in-game track which is so much like I wanted. jolly boppy . . . THING ON A SPRING

The enemies have begun to go in.

13 / 04 / 2018 — Saul

Making the SFX: The sound effects in this case are not so bad as there are only five of them.

To create the item-collect sound I used the triangle wave with an upwards arpeggio (fairly short and light).

For collect-a-key I use a sawtooth wave with the same notes but the arpeggio is reversed so there is a relationship between these two collect sounds, but they are also distinct.

For the tape-collect sound I used some random ever-changing notes and the combined waveforms (triangle + sawtooth and sawtooth + pulse) again randomly changing to create something that sounds like a burst of data on tape.

The sound for losing health is a short downward sweeping buzzer using the pulse waveform.

Finally the bounce starts with a single burst of noise followed by a rapid up and down sweeping arpeggio using the triangle wave.

These sounds are now exported from GOATTRACKER as instruments and then converted to .SND files (which are small snippets of code/data for sound playback) ready to be incorporated into the game.

In this case the in-game tune uses all three voices and is quite busy, so it will be interesting to see how effectively the SFX play in combination with the music. Hopefully an option for music, SFX or both will be offered.

Hopefully all the music and SFX will be agreed by the rest of the team and the SFX will function correctly in game

20 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

Jumping physics now feels right. Well done that man Stu! Still not overly happy with the title screen, I need to have a re-think on this one. Enemy placement and movement will need its own editor, I think, so I've asked Stu to create one for me, this will allow me to do all the enemy placement stuff and then Stu can get on with the rest of the game code.

Testing continues. I want to have a version we can play from start to end before we start adding the enemies.

27 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

A few old bugs have crept back in – though nothing major, thankfully.

Awaiting new title screen music as we didn't think the first version was jolly enough.

We are almost at the full playthrough stage now, then it's onto the enemy placement/movement editor

30 / 04 / 2018 — Trev

New title music arrived from Saul. Perfect

More testing today. Found a few very strange bugs where the effects of the background chars move over each time you enter a room from above.

Stu has found and squashed it in super-quick time. Sound effects are almost all in now, just a few more to go then we are done. New title screen is sorted, just a few sprites to add and some better movement on the Sizzler logo.

We are working hard to get to the point where we can concentrate on the enemies and the enemy editor won't be long now.

The end screen is now also complete, nothing fancy going on but it works well and is pretty cute to look at.

04 / 05 / 2018 — Trev

Reduced the frames on the Foot Enemy by half to save six frames. I will put these to better use adding three extra enemies.

So the rooms are all in and finalised, the music and SFX are all in, the game can be played start to finish. So only one part of the game development to go: the enemy movement editor.

We are on the final stretch now. Apart from that and the odd bug, we can see the light at the end of the dev tunnel.

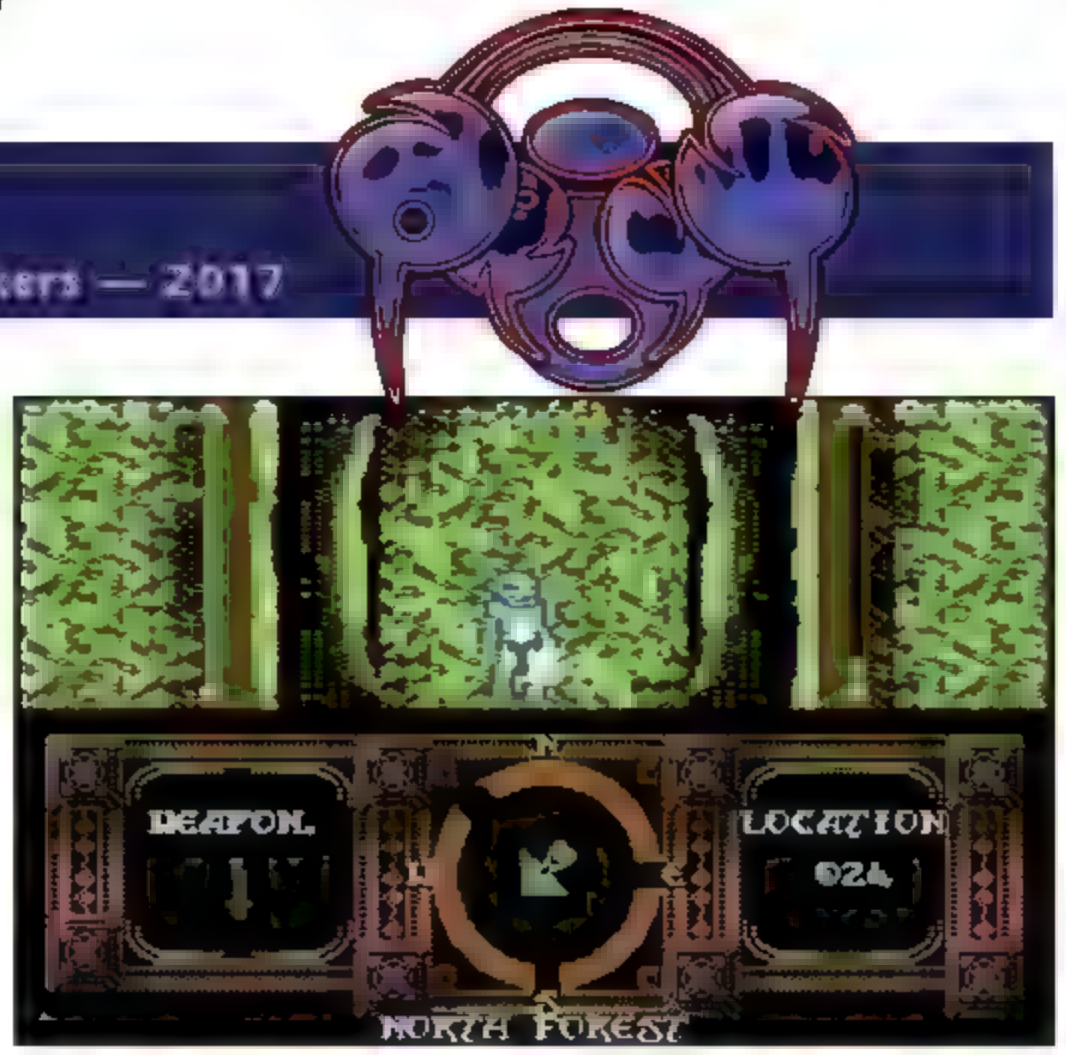
Phew

So wot's it all abaht, then?

Mik3 the tribot has always dreamed of creating a game like his heroes from the past. A C64 game with great graphics and wonderful SID music. After a few failed attempts he decides it's now or never. So you must help **Mik3** roam the rooms of the developers' offices and find as much code, art, music and ideas as you can and then take them to **Stu** the programmer, **Trev** the artist, **Saul** the musician and **Kenz** in the duplicator room. Then finally take your finished game to **ZZAP Towers** and try your best to get a **ZZAP Sizzler** award from **Roger Jaz** and the team. Fame or utter failure await you in this epic quest.

ARGUS

Psytronik/Achim Volkers — 2017



Argus is your typical swords and sorcery affair. It plays a dramatic fantasy back-story before launching the game: Evil Zoran has kidnapped the Starchild and it's your job as the hero Thoran to go to the Starchild's rescue and stop the egregious villain in his stride.

It takes just a quick glance to see that *Argus* is a love letter to old style 8-bit RPGs such as *Bards Tale* and SSI's Gold Box games. Exploring the huge map (1,500 locations) takes place via animated transitions in a third-person flick-screen view. A compass shows the exits available in each location. Moving left or right rotates your position to the direction you want to follow and moving forwards takes you on to that location. A menagerie of nasties lurk in wait in the shadows of each place – a flash of the screen warns that something is close as you move left or right to locate the creature. A quick burst of the selected weapon sees their demise and the fallen sometimes leave behind food that can be collected

I used to devour first-person RPGs, so an action-exploration game along similar lines was going to pique my interest. The problem with Argus is that its pretty exterior hides a lack of substance. There's a feeling of wanderlust without immediate purpose, almost as if some locations were put in for their own sake – a modern version of Cad Cam Warrior. *In each section the rooms lack variety in appearance, function or action. However, the graphics and motion engine sitting behind the game is fantastic, and should be utilised in other projects. It's just a pity here that it's lumbered with such a repetitive game on top.*

Pulling down on the joystick brings up the weapons and items menu: weapons found and selected; keys for open doors; chests and food selected to replenish health. A map of the playing area is also available.

The physical game comes with a map poster along with lots of other goodies such as a keyring, badges and stickers. Depending on the version of the game purchased you may very well get a CD soundtrack of the atmospheric music by Saul Cross that plays in the game

it's not obvious what to do when first confronted by the playing area. Moving the joystick left and right displays different graphics at the top of the screen. Down on the joystick displays icons for items and weapons at the bottom, replacing the compass which shows your orientation. Oh for a tutorial! After experimenting for a bit longer, it becomes clearer that the top portion of the screen depicts movement throughout the forests and mazes as you explore each nook and cranny, killing a variety of baddies as you go and collecting keys and food and other useful items. Flipping back and forth to the map can be a bit laborious, but it's necessary as it's all too easy to go around in circles. Finding the key that unlocks the door to the next level of the dungeon is very satisfying and it is this that keeps your otherwise wavering interest.

The 16-year-old me would have gone nuts at seeing Argus. *A joystick-driven action adventure with RPG overtones, spread over 1,500 screens? I'd have signed up for that on the spot! The 46-year-old me, however, does not have as much patience, and so playing* Argus *was not quite the joyous experience I'd hoped for. Don't get me wrong, this is by no means a bad game. There's a huge quest to undertake, and the initial urge to explore is high. But after a while it all gets a bit familiar. There's not much variety in the locations, and I'd like more of them to feature things to do. The handy map helps a lot, so if Argus grabs you then you'll have few troubles making progress. Those wanting something more immediate might be better off looking elsewhere.*

PRESENTATION

GRAPHICS

SOUND

HOOKABILITY

LASTABILITY

OVERALL 70%

BOMBERLAND

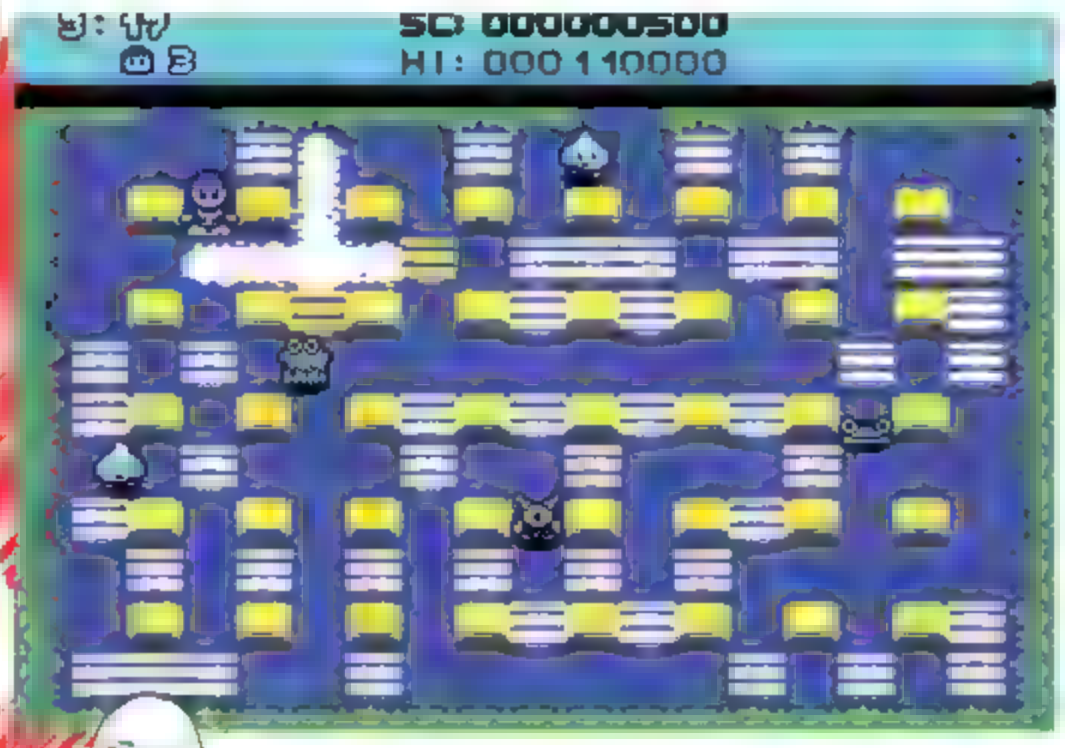
Bomberman appeared on just about every gaming system since the dawn of time – well it does seem that way to us veteran gamers. The C64 now gets its own version – *Bomberland* – of this multiplayer classic where up to five players can go head to head (yes, there is a device available that permits this – four joysticks and the keyboard) in dropping bombs around a single-screen maze in the hope that its four-way explosions catch one of the competing players until you are rid of them all. Saturday evenings in with your mates will never be the same!

There is also a game for a solo player who drops bombs to clear the level of a myriad of patrolling enemies and to find exits to subsequent levels. Place bombs with the fire button and get clear within the two-second time limit. The explosion clears any walls in its vicinity as well as slaughtering any nearby enemies. The trick is to not blow yourself up, which is easily done in the heat of the moment. Power-ups can be collected along the way including the ability to drop more than one bomb, extending the explosion range of your bombs

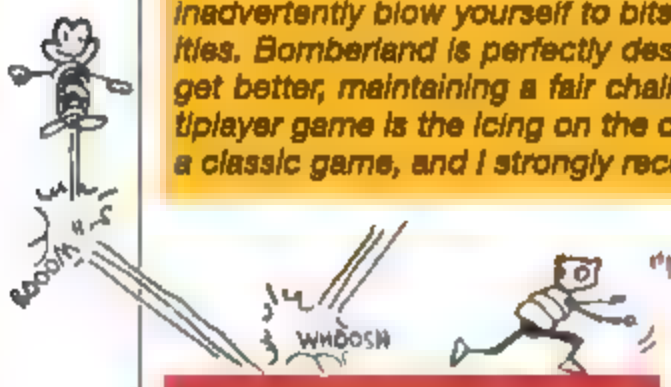
I played the 1993 SNES Super Bomberman *to death, complete with five-player multitap.* Bomberland *is as close as you're going to get on the C64, both in single- and multi-player – a remarkable achievement. It could almost be called a demake. Single-player is still the same slow, laborious grind fest, livened up by some entertaining boss battles, but it allows new players to grasp the mechanics and nuances required. Multiplayer is where it's all at! Not many videogames capture the frenetic, swear inducing, backstabbing nature that human competition inspires and compels, but this fits the bill. The lack of computer opponents is the only quibble, but one thing's for sure you'll have a blast with this game!*

BOMBERLAND

and a speed-up pickup where movement through the maze is somewhat accelerated. Time is of the essence in *Bomberland* – each level has a countdown and on zero Time Guards appear to hunt you down from all sides . . . so be quick! To reach Lord Bomber there are 36 levels divided into six worlds each with its own theme such as the Swamps, the Snowy Foothills, the Brick Factory and much much more. To get off a world and on tho the next you must defeat the end-of-level boss.



The Bomberman concept dates back to 1983, but since it only really took off in the 1990s a version never came out for the C64. I'm happy to report that Bomberland *now fills that niche very nicely. The gameplay may be simple, but the game itself is deceptively tricky and destroying Lord Bomber and his minions takes some clever strategic thinking. The use of power-ups (and downs!) keeps things exciting and addictive, with you having to keep your concentration lest you* ***inadvertently blow yourself to bits with your ever more powerful abilities. Bomberland is perfectly designed so that it gets harder as you get better, maintaining a fair challenge throughout. The superb multiplayer game is the icing on the cake. This is an excellent*** *version of* ***a classic game, and I strongly recommend that you take a*** *look at it.*



PRESENTATION 86%

GRAPHICS 76%

SOUND 80%

HOOKABILITY 91%

LASTABILITY 86%

OVERALL 88%

It's a crime that *it took over 25 years to bring a version to the C64. Here Michal Okowicki offers his labour of love,* Bomberland. *Reportedly a whopping ten years in development, I feel that a large chunk of that time has been spent fine tuning to capture the essence of what makes the original concept fun. That for me has always been the deathmatch mode. Multiple players (this game can handle up to five) out to kill or be killed and any frustration herein is purely down to opponents skills and not game mechanics. Bomberland offers authenticity and a solid 'true to its roots' feel by not straying far from the original, while detailed graphics complement a plethora of recognisable tunes. My 21 and my 49 year-old self salute this game with a hearty thumbs up.*

RESCUING ORC

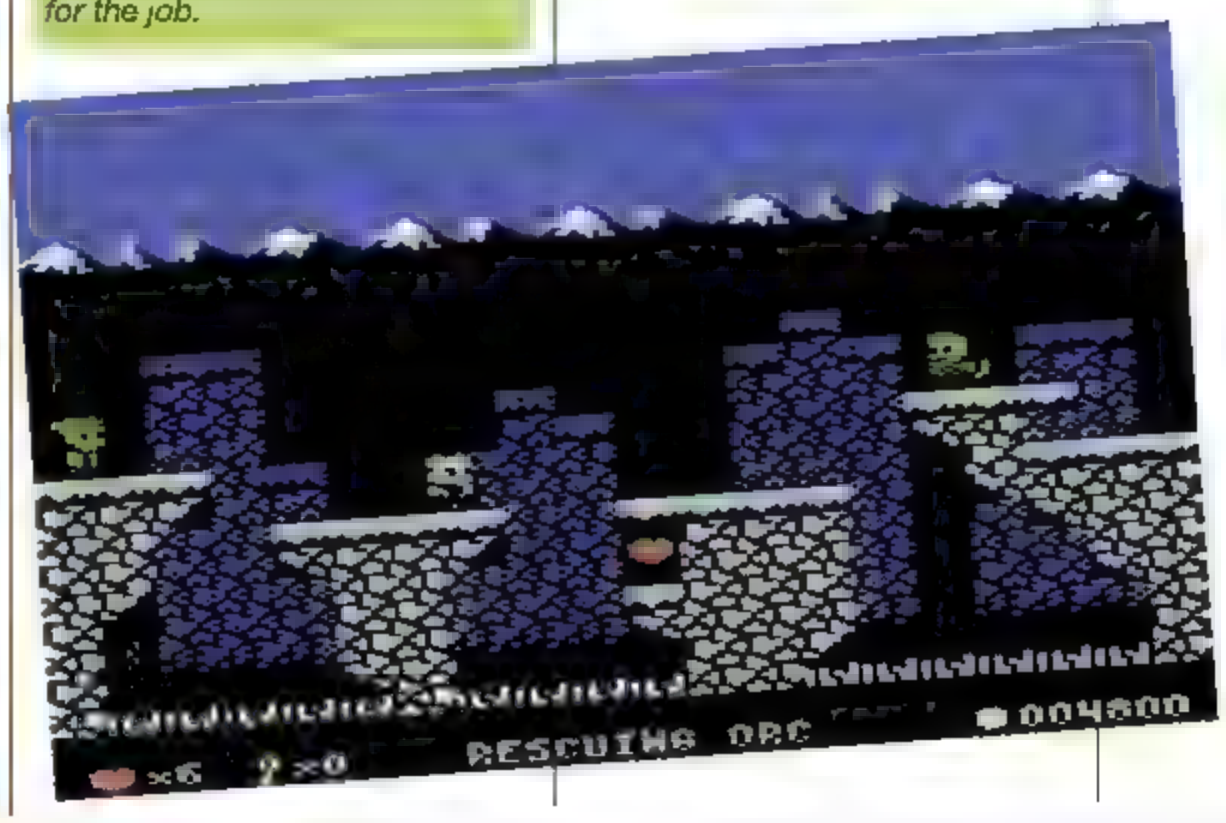
Poly Play — 2017

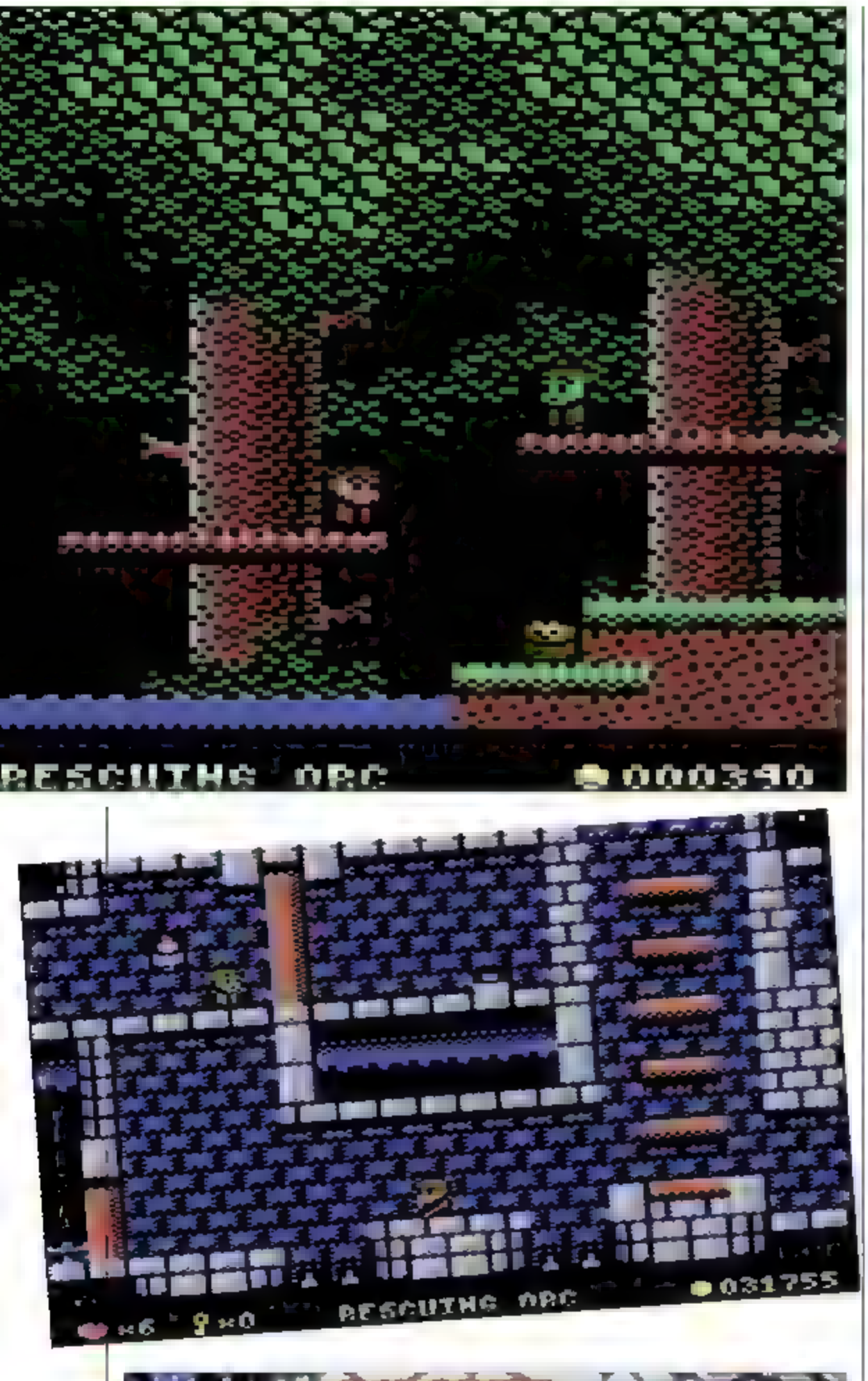
How concerned are you when a friend seemingly disappears? Even more so when it's Orc, your very bestest friend who hasn't shown up for tea after a couple of weeks. Time to go find out what's happened to him. Armed with a sword, go forth into the dangerous world of Magica where things are not always what they seem. This, it has to be said is because you are a goblin, albeit one with a good character.

The mission kicks off deep in the Black Forest – the home of vanished Orc – and sets you the task of exploring five different locations to reach the corridors of Bluestone Keep. Orc's homeland isn't such a nice place, it's crawling with Elves, Slimes and giant predatory Bats.

In the Rocky Mountains Lizardmen ambush adventurous travellers by throwing stones at them to make the unwary fall over the edge of the gorge and plunge to their death on the sharp rocks at the bottom. And if that isn't enough, watch out for the way the very rocks come alive, silent

What a cute little game this is! It reminds me a little of Wonder Boy in Monster Land *and although it's not as good as that classic, it's a decent game in its own right. The World of Magica is tricky to negotiate, and patience is a virtue if you're to make good progress. Trust me, teeth will be gnashed. Jumping can be overly precise, and there's the odd leap of faith to contend with, too. Regular backtracking becomes a habit after mistiming a jump and a fall to somewhere with no clear path back to where you were. While this is often a game-breaking annoyance, there's something about* Rescuing Orc *that compelled me to press on. Those looking for a challenging arcade adventure should apply for the job.*



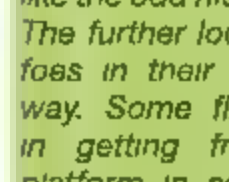


Rescuing Orc is a curious beast indeed. Very soft on the out side, hard on the inside, a bit like those purple Quality Street chocolates everyone avoided at Christmas. Sink your teeth in and discover you aren't quite getting what you expected on first impressions. Similarly, you are lulled into thinking you are getting somewhere, but in the finest of Final Fight traditions, the last area is about the same size as the previous four combined. It's not a huge game, but it is a frustrating one in the process. Some of the jumps require almost perfect positioning, and some multi-hit enemies are rather difficult to defeat even after you've worked out the best strategy to handle them. Persevere and there's an entertaining, challenging game presented in a very old-school fashion, with some remarkably cute graphics but it may prove too annoying for some.

Golems slowly pacing up and down looking for victims to crush.

Your final goal, Bluestone Keep, is no pushover. The legends say it once housed men of good intent, but now the evil they once fought has subsumed the castle, and the mad King puts his hopes and dreams in the hands of wizards and their arcane arts. And then there are his soldiers and knights who protect the King and his treasure.

In addition to the free download, *Rescuing Orc* is also available to purchase as a collector's edition on disk or cassette.



It may not be a graphical masterpiece and it all seems very low key with its basic platform gameplay but I really like Rescuing Orc. *The hero is small and the enemies don't have much variety in each area, but it's a charming game helped by the cute hero, his little underground cave and a simple story. In fact I'd happily stay in his cosy cave forever if it weren't for the pesky quest. It's easy to get through your generous number of lives very quickly in the first few goes but its sweet nature drew me back. As I started to explore I found a way through the cave and beyond helped along by nice surprises like the odd hidden passageway. The further locations bring new foes in their own understated way. Some finesse is needed in getting from platform to platform in some areas but it never seems unfair. By rights it shouldn't amount to much as it is certainly not a* Sam's Journey *in scale, graphical or audio splendour, and* Barnsley Badger *has a faster pace and larger area to explore, but I enjoyed the no-nonsense jump/attack exploration and the overall pleasant nature of it all. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going back to that cave to have a rest.*

OVERALL 76%

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Andreas Varga — 2011

The question never was whether the Commodore 64 could handle Prince of Persia, but whether it could be as good as the game deserved. Taking advantage of available cartridge technology, something most C64GS releases never did, the result is a stone cold classic, and if you've never played the game before, then you're in for a real treat. The comprehensive but occasionally awkward controls are yin and yang, but necessary to navigate the cunning nature of the level design. Very few 8-bit ports were based on the original format's source code, so not only is this release a sublime experience with stunningly animated graphics, bags of atmosphere, and a stern challenge, you can rest assured it's as close to the Apple II original as can be. Had it been released in the early 1990s, this version would have been massively rated. It's merely had to wait 25 years or so for that honour instead.

Let us whizz back to the late 1980s where we find gaming at a turning point. The 8-bit systems are starting to wane in favour of 16-bit powerhouses, mobile gaming is just about to be thrust into the mainstream thanks to Nintendo's Gameboy with a genuine classic game – *Tetris*

At roughly the same time these events were taking place, another true classic game entered the gaming pantheon, a game that would spawn not only an entire franchise but be ported to pretty much every system known to man . . . apart from one, the C64. That game was and still is *Prince of Persia*. Trying to come up with a fresh approach when discussing *Prince of Persia* is not easy. Almost everyone knows about the game and will inevitably have played it at some point.

To be able to finally play *Prince of Persia* on the C64 is quite a big deal. Andreas Varga's version for the C64 is based on the original Apple II code written by Jordan Mechner, which makes this an extremely accurate port, but this is where we run into a problem – it can't be played on your ordinary standard C64.

The Apple code needs 128K RAM to run and the humble C64 on its own just hasn't got the bus fare, but all is not lost. Like a genie from a bottle, hail the **Easyflash** expansion cartridge! This clever device provides the necessary storage to finally allow C64 owners a chance to play *Prince of Persia*, although you'll have to be prepared to shell out some additional cash should you wish to defeat Grand Vizier Jaffar.

If by some astonishing lapse in good judgement you haven't, the tale involves some Arabian Nights-style mischief and magic. With the Sultan absent at war, so the story tells us, his ambitious and wicked vizier Jaffar attempts to seize the throne.

An important part of the plan is to force the Sultan's daughter to marry him. At her refusal he throws her in prison and gives her a single hour to change her mind or be executed. Her only hope is her true love, but unfortunately he's incarcerated in the dungeon and likely to rot away there. Of course, as the player, you might be clever and intrepid enough to find a way out for him so he can rescue the princess – but you have just 60 real-time minutes to succeed. And that means negotiating the many dangers to reach and defeat Jaffar and make the Sultan's daughter (and the throne) your own

ZZAP! TEST

From the earliest days of gaming there have been games on other platforms that we wished would be converted to our own Commodore 64, but worried that they wouldn't be done justice. **Prince of Persia** *is one such game. Fear not:* **C64 Prince of Persia** *is a triumph. Almost every aspect of the original is here, from the stunning graphics to the precise (yet still awkward) controls to the devious puzzles. Rescuing the Princess is an almighty challenge, but one that any self-respecting gamer should be taking on I still can't quite believe that they've crammed everything in.* Prince of Persia *was always a classic; now it's a C64 classic too.*

A long time in gestation, **PoP** *has been worth the wait, a conversion that easily captures the essence of the 16-bit version Other than the sword and health to pick up, the game is a pure test of how good you are at Persian parkour. This can make it seem lacking in depth but it's not a game that ever wanted be complicated, there's enough of a task just learning to time your leaps without adding unnecessary extras. Prince of Persia is well presented with cutscenes and an atmospheric location and boasts lovely animation. It is the game fans of the original Amiga version deserve.*

PRESENTATION

GRAPHICS

SOUND

LOOKABILITY

PLAYABILITY

OVERALL 92%

ZZAP! TEST

HESSIAN

Psytronik/Covert BiTops — 2016

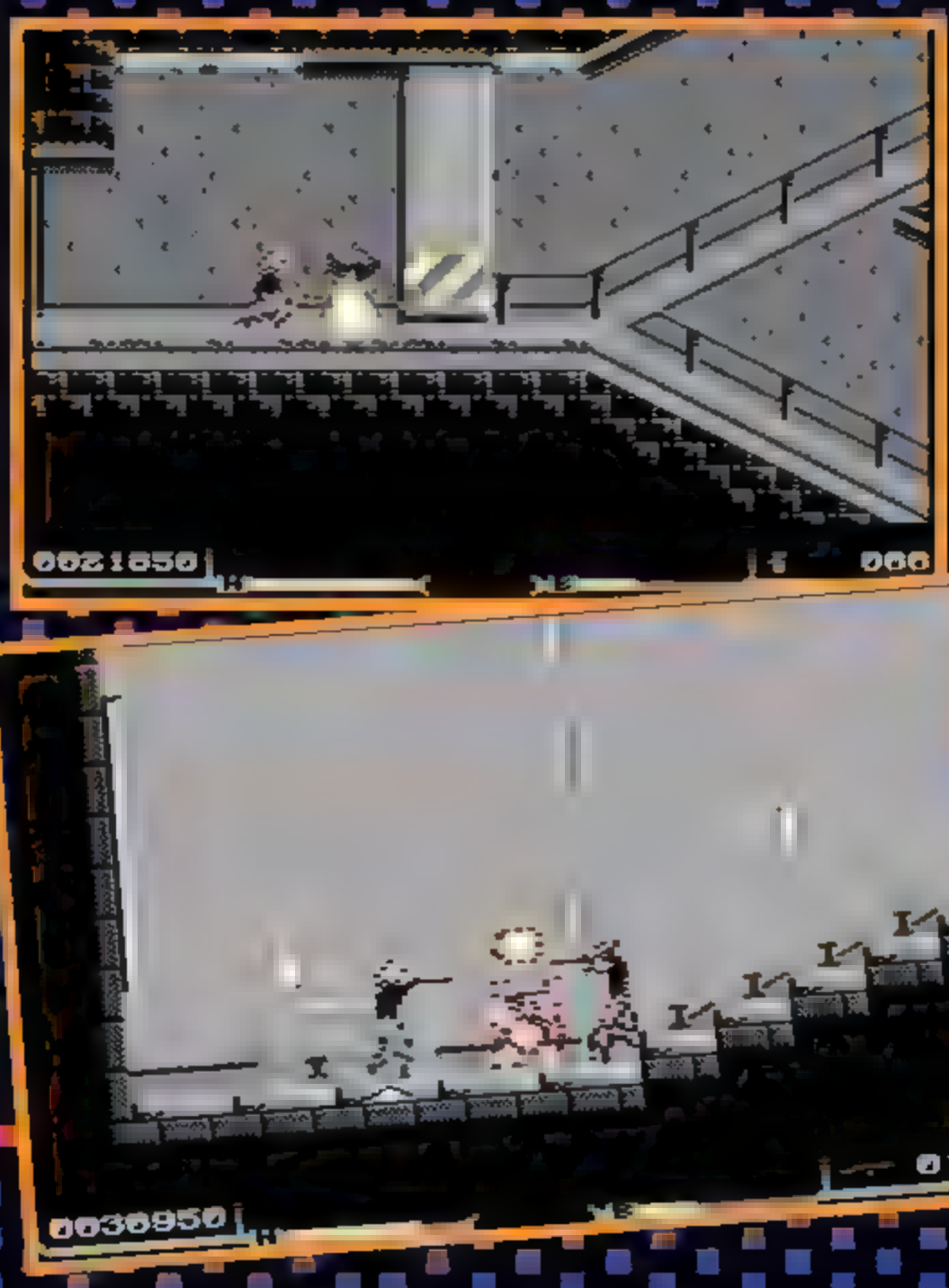
HESSIAN

Security guards often get the short end of the night stick. Take Kim for example, just minding her own business working nights at the Thrane Group Science Complex, but suddenly finds herself waking up on a makeshift operating table with only a fuzzy recollection of what just transpired, and the ability to trigger any metal detector worldwide. Seems someone at the company was trying to play God behind the scenes with the creation of a new intelligent AI, and it's rebelled with devastating effect.

Kim's repaired cyborg body contains nanobots, meaning she can regain health while standing still, a scientifically explainable reason to employ the standard regeneration trope of today's videogames. The nanobots require power however, and thus you must either find batteries or the occasional recharge station.

As the person best placed and equipped to investigate the situation, Kim is told to grab a gun and get on out there. And boy is there a lot of complex to explore! There are trapped people to rescue for starters, and indeed her various interactions with some of them periodically, and the choices made at certain invisible branch points can determine how future events pan out. Aspects of Kim's body such as damage resistance, aiming accuracy, recharge rate, and weapon capacities can be improved via sub-game inside the development laboratories although you will need to interrogate the computer terminals to discover the passcodes needed. Weapons and ammo can be scavenged from hostiles, with spare parts used as currency at ammo and item stations along the way.

Inevitably you will die trying but fear not – *Hessian* employs a frustration-light restart mechanic. In-game loading is also frequent but done as seamlessly as possible and saving the game is possible at any point.

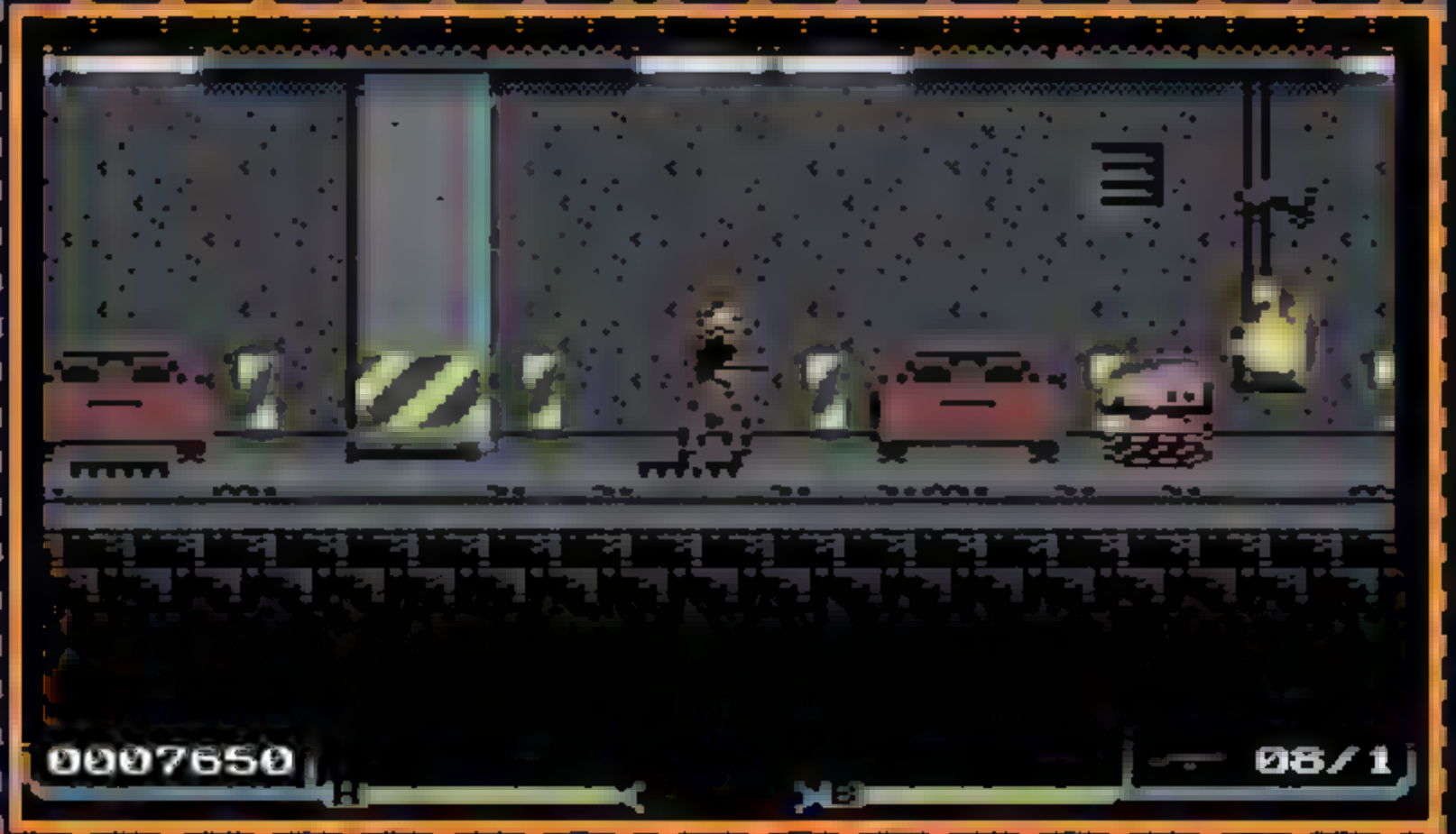


Hessian *is a large, well thought out, graphically impressive outrun and gun with an excellent narrative providing a strong incentive to continue deeper into the facility. It's easy to get lost in the myriad corridors and stairwells – it's a great game for mapping. Progress brings its own hard fought rewards of interactions with survivors, bigger and badder robots and codelocked doors uncovering new areas such as the armoury and labs. The latter is a nice touch, introducing expanded capabilities for Kim. Worthy of note too are the computer logs, which do a great job of revealing* Hessian*'s mysteries and introducing new challenges in a timely manner. A few niggles: mistiming climbing stairs to escape robotic death or quickly trying to swap direction to fire and swap between weapons makes it easy to get in a muddle and lose health rapidly. Best advice: run when two or three robots are in pursuit. Fortunately, swapping screens resets the robots and Kim can recharge health, so I didn't die too many times. This is helpful, as batteries and health are relatively sparse.* Hessian *keeps you hooked and provides a strong challenge, a large play area and various difficulty levels, it's a polished, exciting techno-thriller and well worth a look.*

Like any good story, Hessian *drags you in from the start – hooked, you want to find out more. How all this was squeezed into one disk side I don't know. There are a staggering number of locations and merely a few number-locked doors halting further exploration. There are also consequences to some of your choices that alter the plot and progression, resulting in different possible endings. Aspects such as the retry system, believable health generation mechanism, terminal messages filling in background details, and the sub-game puzzles for physical upgrades are more than mere cherries on the cake. The single minor niggle is the twitchy stair navigating controls. Regardless, Lasse Öorni has once more delivered a sublime experience featuring another thumping soundtrack. Now, what was that last key code . . . ?*

I'm impressed by the ambition shown in Lasse Oörni's games, and this is no exception. Hessian *serves up an exceptional sci-fi epic, with a number of interesting features. I love that the protagonist is female – and why not?*

The scenario is superb, and it's this that drags you instantly into the game. It's seriously challenging in parts, but the fact that your energy recharges alleviates some of that difficulty, and it's a real thrill to scrape through a battle then be able to rest and recuperate before storming once more unto the breach. An intelligent continue system makes the game easier to complete, but not a pushover, meaning that it stays a challenge until the end. Hessian has something for everyone . . . arcade adventurers, mappers and high-score addicts will find much to keep them enthralled.



OVERALL
93%

ASSEMBLOIDS

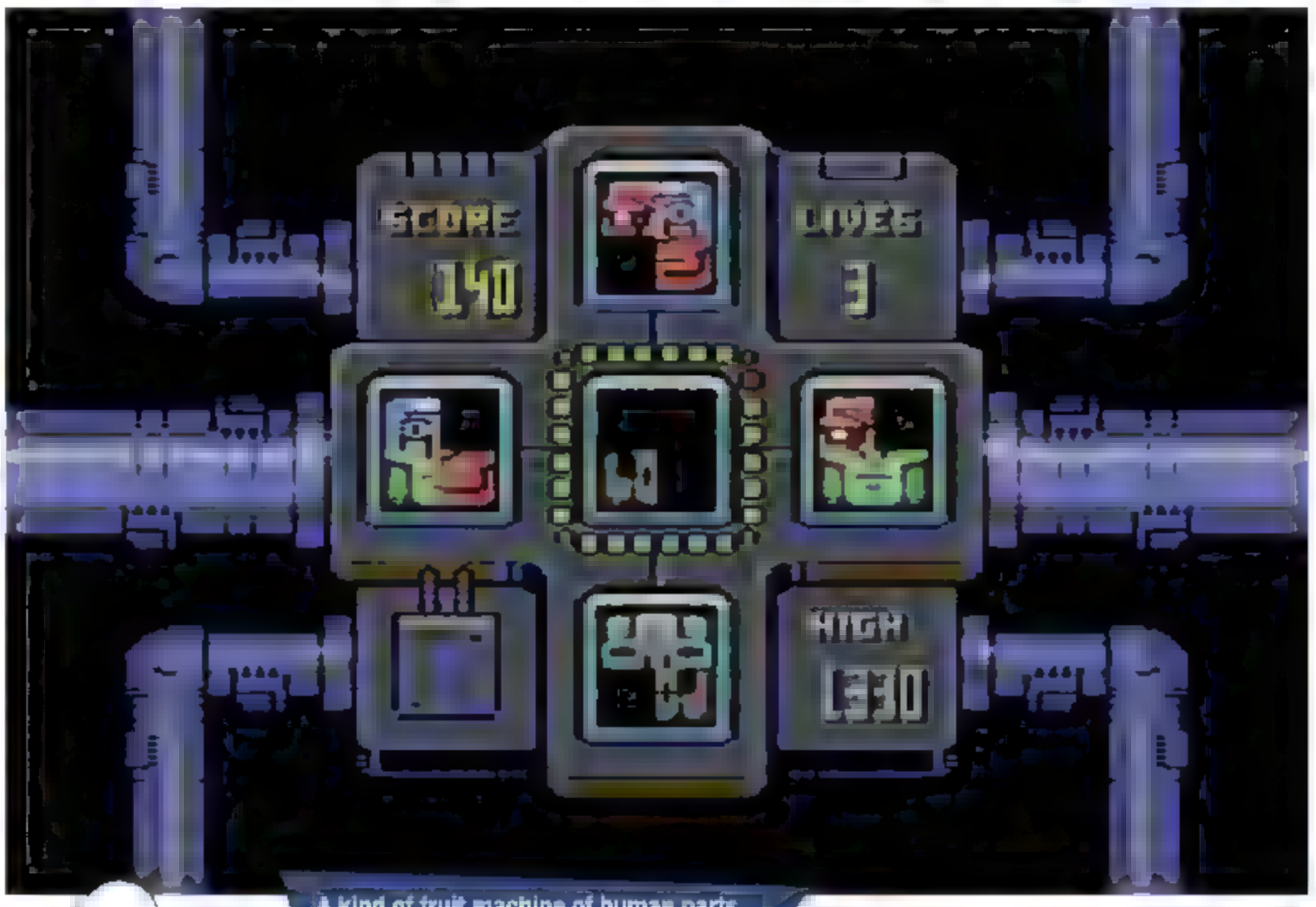
Psytronik, RGCD — 2013

Prosopagnosia, or face blindness to you and me, is a condition where the ability to recognise familiar faces is impaired. What does this have to do with this game though? Simple: after a few hours playing *Assembloids* you may just question if you now suffer from this cognitive disorder. One thing is for sure, you'll be looking at your nearest and dearest in a whole new way

Assembloids is a simple game, a puzzle game – just assemble four faces from four quarter pieces by moving the single random face piece that appears in the middle of the screen to one of four adjacent locations. The more parts of the same face used to complete a face, the greater the score given.

The fiendish part of the game is the very small amount of thinking time given when each face part appears; take too long and a life is lost. Place two of the same face quarters onto the same face location, a further life is lost. Extra points are rewarded if a complete face is made from matching parts – if the board is cleared an extra life is awarded

A frustratingly addictive game achieved in 16K.



A kind of fruit machine of human parts...

It's always the simple ideas that make a good game and this one does not really get much simpler · just make a complete face from random pieces that appear on screen from four different faces. If a face is made from the four correct pieces for that face – well bonus points all around. The game is most definitely of the twitch type as you have to quickly make a decision where each face piece goes – take too long and a life is lost. Eventually your brain melts and mistakes abound and its game over very quickly. One for a micro-switched joystick methinks. And 16K how on earth

You only have one thing to do in Assembloids, ever· move the pieces in one of four directions to make faces. It sounds easy but once that time limit starts decreasing more quickly reactions and capacity for quick thinking are tested to their fullest. Simplicity is key: the programmer hasn't included anything unnecessary to make the game better, it simply stands on its own merits, which are considerable. All you get is basic, uncluttered and enjoyable gameplay, meaning Assembloids is one I'll come back to time and again.

This game earned Enthusi second place in RGCD's 2012 16K competition of 2012, and it's not hard to see why. This definitely requires a sturdy joystick when the action really ramps up! While it's simple to grasp and play, that's also its weakness, for in the end it is just a score attack panic puzzler and there's only so long you can prolong play before the inevitable game over pops up. The key is to score as much as possible before the speed becomes ludicrous. Although if there are people who can Tetris at light speed, they will probably find this a doddle by comparison!

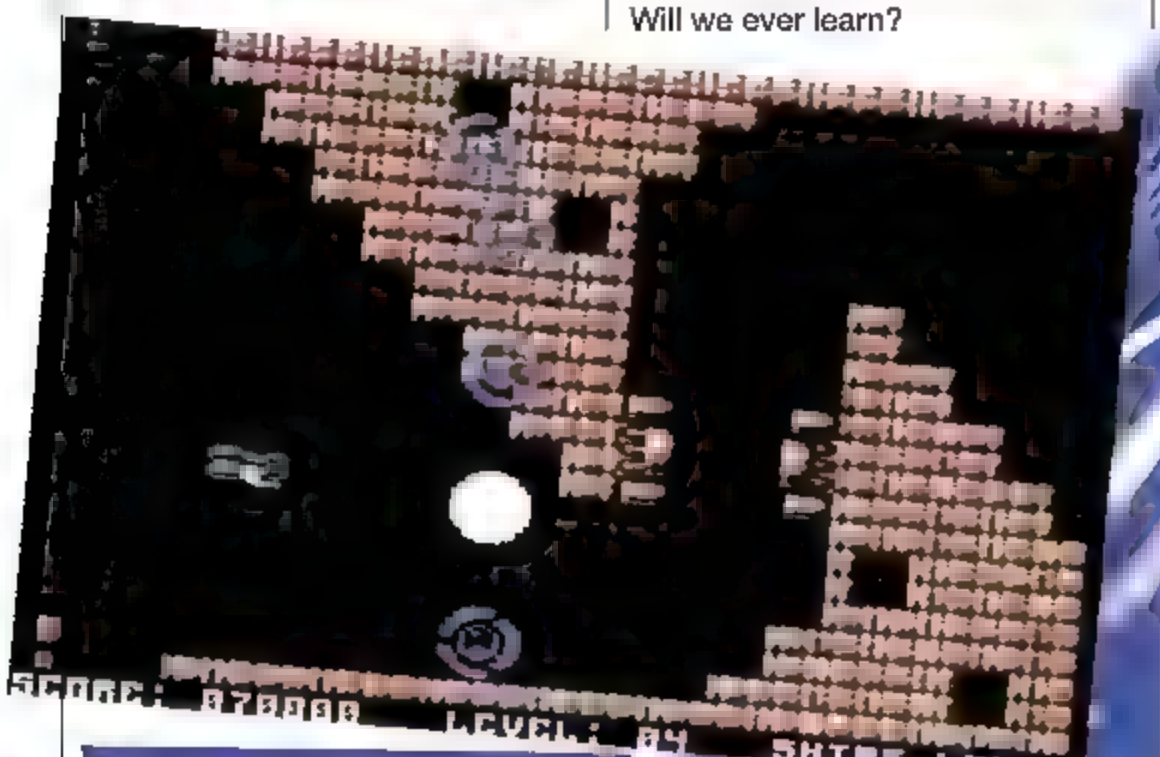
D-FORCE

You know how it is. Earth has been around for long enough now. We all know the planet is vulnerable to attack from alien scum. That's just how it is. What we need are better deterrents. A planetary defence shield would be just the job. As luck would have it, we are aware of a planet called Darx, which just happens to have huge quantities of the mineral we need to build this shield.

Darx is an inhabited planet, but rather than resort to diplomacy or trade, we've decided to get the minerals we need by invading them and taking what we want. There's irony for you!

The residents of Darx didn't take kindly to this impertinence and, perhaps unsurprisingly, they defended their planet against this alien invasion (that's you, remember?).

Their mothership captured you before you could do any damage, and your job is to blast your way through the planet's 16 underground sectors and make good your escape. Once you're out, maybe you can lead a peaceful summit and negotiate with Darx to get those minerals. Ahh, who are we kidding? We all know you'll be sent back there to loot and pillage. Will we ever learn?



The loading screen owes something to Oli Frey's artwork for the Thalamus game *Delta Force*.

I usually love shoot 'em ups, but I'm not a fan of this at all. Generic alien ships race in at incredible speeds, in unrealistic formations, while you try and fend them off with your slow-firing peashooter. Weapons can be upgraded, but even then some of the pickups are rubbish or even kill you! Even if you do get one of the good ones, progress is usually dependent on whether you're lucky enough to be in the right position when the attack begins. To top it all off, if you miss anything, the chances are it will come back to wreak a surprise revenge from behind. Survive all this and get to level two and you'll be thrilled to discover it's more or less the same as level one. If you want to play a Richard Bayliss shoot 'em up, read the Sub Hunter *review and go for that instead.*

As a big fan of the genre, I like nothing more than a good shoot 'em up . . . sadly, this is nothing like one. Where it is fair to concede trope wise that your ship will start underpowered and get progressively better equipped as you progress, that doesn't really happen. Matters are not helped either by the enemy formations being too fast to begin with, and then tending to return on screen and colliding up your backside! It doesn't make for a fair or balanced game on level six, let alone happening on level one, and it feels more akin to an avoid 'em up with shooty bits. Not that you can tell an awful lot between levels either. Richard has put out several excellent games over the years, unfortunately this isn't one of them. At least the music is pretty good.

PRESENTATION 61%

GRAPHICS 54%

SOUND 58%

HOOKABILITY 45%

LASTABILITY 32%

OVERALL 43%

A very uninspiring effort with

DESIGN FOR LIFE

the history of

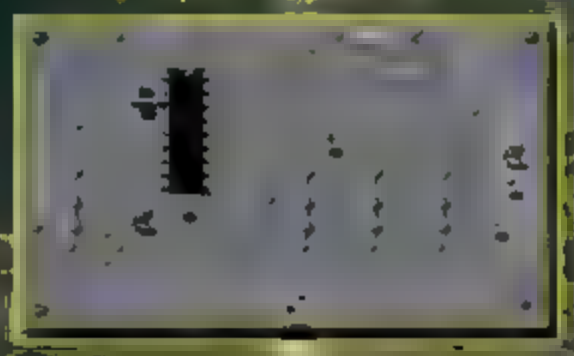
SHOOT-EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT

By Professor Brian Stu

In 1987 Sensible Software was riding high on the success of its first two full-price games – *Parallax* and *Wizball*. So it was a surprise to see the company's next release, a game creation utility known as *Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit* (or *SEUCK* for short). It has proved to be one of the most popular game creation utilities for the Commodore 64, with new games created in SEUCK still getting a release.

SEUCK is a collection of utilities for creating a game, all tied together under one main menu. Chris Yates had programmed each of the utilities for his Sensible colleague Jon Hare to create games with, and then they approached publishing label Outlaw (part of Palace Software) to market the complete kit. There is an editor to create sprites, an editor to create background graphics and maps, a very simple but powerful sound effect creator and so on.

Head to the Wild West in *SEUCK* demo game *Outlaw* and stop bugs attacking the computer chips in *Transputer Man*.



The original release came with four demonstration games to show what the Kit was capable of. *Slap 'n Tickle* was heavily inspired by the arcade game *Slap Fight*, while Outlaw was a Western shoot 'em up much like Gunsmoke by Capcom and featured a female second player. *Transputer Man* was a still-screen game with great backgrounds made to look like circuit boards, and the hero sprite from Parallax making a comeback. Finally, *Celebrity Disaster* (AKA *Celebrity Squares – The Game They Tried To Ban*) had the distinction of using graphics from industry legends including Dan Malone, Gary Liddon and Tim Metcalf from *C&VG*. *SEUCK* earned a coveted Gold Medal in issue 32 of ZZAP!64, with Julian Rignall calling it 'a milestone in computing history'.

Outlaw would go on to release the Kit for Amiga and Atari ST users too, although early pirate copies on the Amiga were struck down with a virus. The major difference with the 16-bit versions was the use of sampled sounds, allowing the user to load in IFF files for the sound FX. Perhaps the best known Amiga *SEUCK* game would be *Smurf H* by Pat Carson, notorious for its blood.

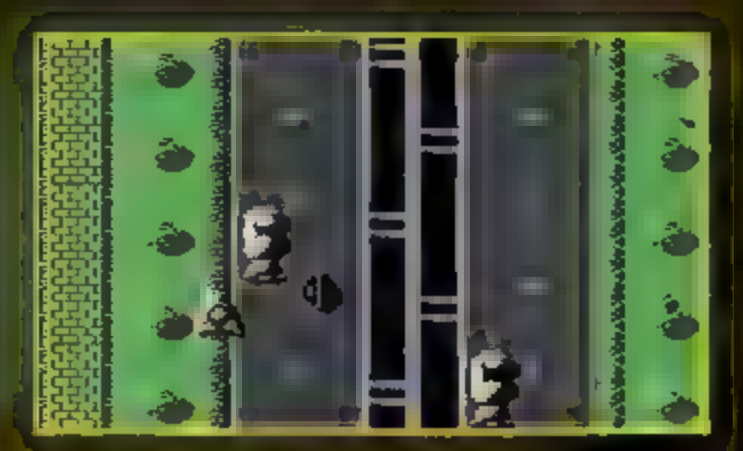
Putting together a game with the Kit is relatively simple, especially compared to learning how to program. Keyboard shortcuts help the user move around, or the joystick can be used to select options from the menus. Sprites are edited on a large grid before being assigned to Objects, which include the enemies, bullets and explosions. Each Enemy has a separate screen of options, deciding how it fires, how fast it moves and the points for killing it.

The Player Limitations are specified, setting where onscreen the player can move and fire. The Sound FX are created and applied to the Objects (and events such as gaining an extra life, or enemy explosions). The Background characters are formed into Blocks that are plotted into the map. This map is then split up into a series of Levels that can be still, vertically scrolling or push scrolling (think *Commando*, where the map only moves when the player reaches the top of the screen; the Player Limitations let you set that point). The Attack Waves are added to the map by finding where an enemy needs to start, pressing Fire and moving it around.

or larger bosses. The Front End (allowi defined characters and colour effects) hat appears before the game starts. All this was possible in a single load. But in th US the drive light switches on to indicat activity'. The publishers were conce hat users would think it did not make fu se of the disk!

The final game can be tested withi

A sprite from demo game *Slap 'n Tickle* in the editor.

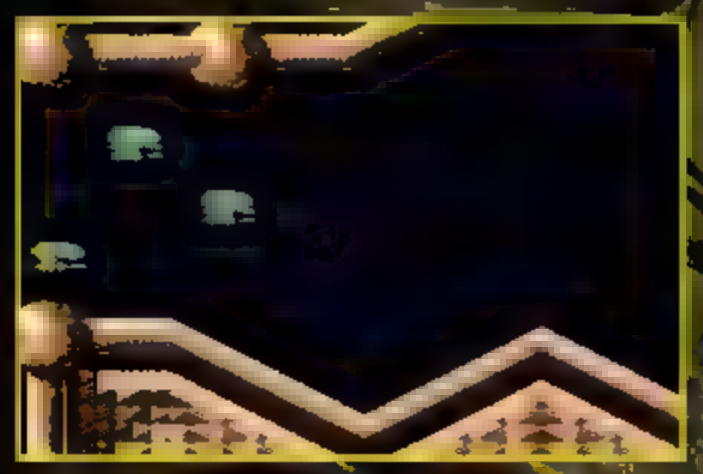


Head out on the highway in *Slap 'n Tickle*. Pat Carson's *Smurf Hunt* was created with the Amiga *SEUCK*.

the Kit, with an infinite-lives option to help play through. Parts of the game (such as sprites, backgrounds and attack waves) can be saved to tape or disk or loaded in, or all of the data saved in one block. Once the game is finished, it can be saved out to run independently of the utility. This made it ideal for users to share their games.

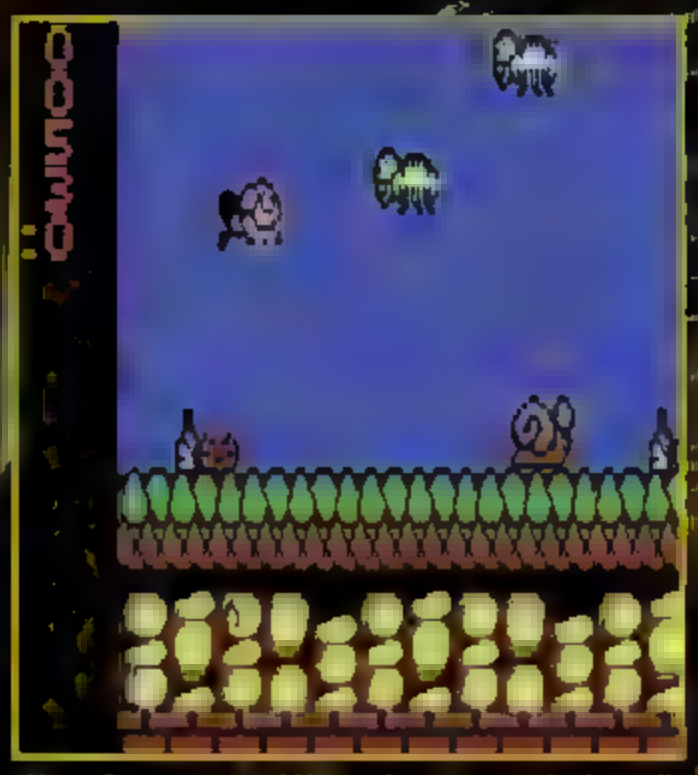
ZZAP!64 published the Sensible Guide to Construction shortly after the Kit had been released; a two-part feature written by Jon Hare himself, it was designed to help beginners by talking through how the four demo games had been created. The commercial release *Wheelies* was also partly developed in the Kit, with extra code added. (It can be considered the first enhanced *SEUCK* game). Ironically, a young graphic artist called Stoo Cambridge would [illegible] called *Battle Ball* with the Kit and [illegible] to get it published – before he would go on to be an important member of Sensible Software.

Commodore Format featured several *SEUCK* games on its cover tapes, most notably *Aquablasta* for issue 19 and *Daedalus* with issue 60. That accompanied a two-part feature on using the Kit, which had been re-released on the Gremlin GBH budget label. Jon Wells would go on to write another series of articles for *Commodore Format* that showed how *SEUCK* games could be enhanced, adding features such as music, new title screens and much more. Examples included the Alf Yngve game *Twin Tigers*, which had added in-game music, a new title screen and animated background characters.



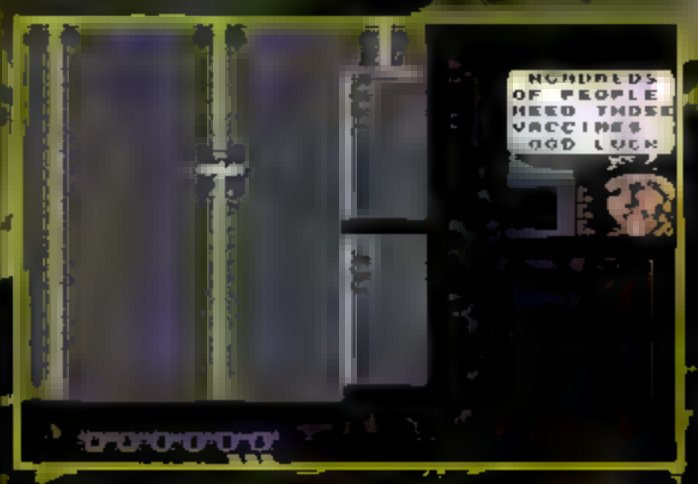
Editing attack waves in Sideways SEUCK (by Jon Wells) is just as easy.

Perhaps the biggest development since the original release was *Sideways SEUCK*, programmed by Jon Wells and first released in 2008. He was able to re-work the original Kit to create games that scrolled from left to right (the opposite to more famous games such as *Nemesis* or *Armalyte*). This led to a new wave of games and opened up new possibilities. Another programmer, Martin Piper, released his *SEUCK Redux* code that same year. With an improved sprite multiplexer to stop flickering and the possibility of adding features such as power-ups directly into the code, the *Redux* engine has helped improve many games already.

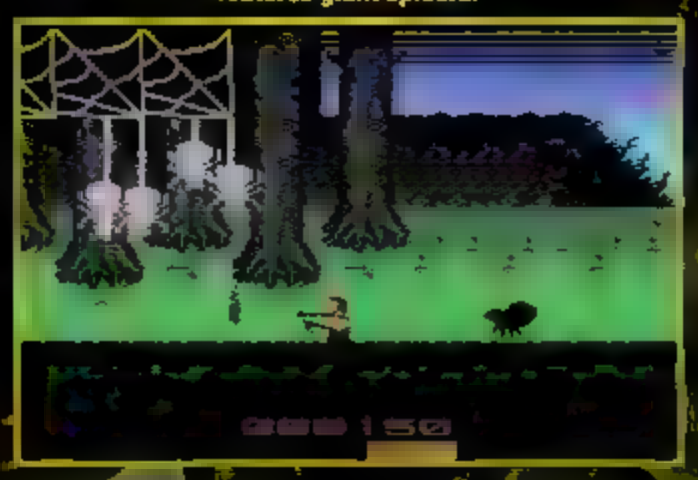


Shaun Pearson rotated his monitor to create 'horizontal' scroller *Fly Pig* (before *Sideways SEUCK* was invented!)

The enhancements and sideways scrolling have featured in a series of *SEUCK* competitions over the last ten years, each bringing forward a new crop of games and even new creators. There are critics who say that the games all look and play the same – but a short go of any of the games on our Hit List will prove them wrong. Check out the WEB LINKS box for some helpful sites to get the best out of the Kit and to enhance your games. With a little effort and some attention to detail, you too can make a great game with *SEUCK*.



Not all alike: *Flight of the Albatross*, from Alf Yngve's first *Shoot 'Em Up Destruction Set* and inspired by *Forbidden Forest*, the horror game *Forgotten Forest* — features giant spiders.



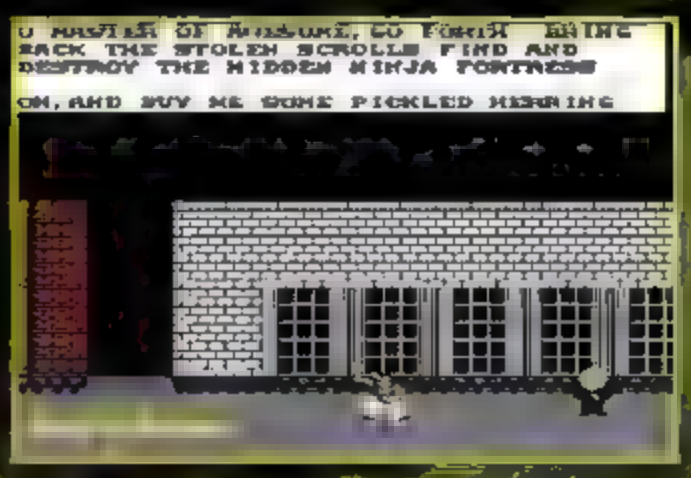
The cover of the third *Shoot 'Em Up Destruction Set* compilation and Psytronik's Premium Plus release of SEUDS 4, cover artwork by Oli Frey.

THE HIT LIST

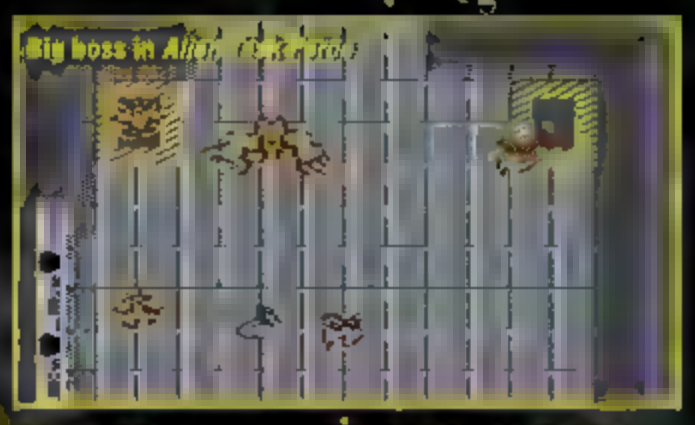
To see what *SEUCK* can achieve, here is a diverse and impressive list – we couldn't narrow it down to just [illegible] games! All of these titles show how flexible and powerful the Kit is.

Shoot 'Em Up Destruction Set Series by Alf Yngve

Alf is the true master of *SEUCK*, creating many excellent games over the years. The best of these have been compiled for the *SEUDS* series from Psytronik Software, spread over four editions. (The recent editions came with cover artwork by none other than Oli Frey). The games in each *SEUDS* release have added title screens, music or sound FX options and even power-ups. A huge range of genres is covered, from *Operation Wolf*-style shooting games, a horizontal action game (*Blue Beret*) that rivals the famous coin-op conversion *Green Beret*, to stealth (as seen in *Scratch McBlagger*, where the player must escape from prison by hiding from patrolling guards and dogs). Alf also produced the scrolling beat 'em up trilogy *Kung Fu Maniacs*, complete with extra weapons to pick up and well-made sprites.



SHOOT 'EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT



ALIEN TASK FORCE & ALIEN TASK FORCE II by Ryan Chenery

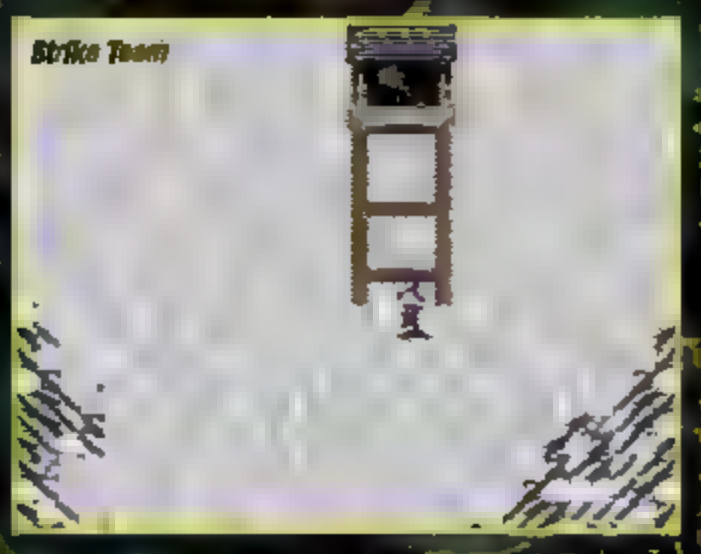
Fans of the Amiga game *Alien Breed* should check out these titles. With some gruesome graphics and plenty of xenomorphs to blast, this is a good-looking game. Viewed from overhead, one or two players must rescue survivors from a spaceship in distress invaded by aliens. The sequel features a human

colony that has been attacked. Sliding doors open, monitors switch off when touched and deadly alien growth appears on the walls. Ryan created the excellent *Command* series (*Air*, *Navy* and *Space*) for some more conventional blasting.

CLEO THE DOG by Carl Mason

Did you know *SEUCK* can be used to create platform games? With careful positioning of background objects, it is possible to have ladders and platforms. The cute graphics really sell this one, with Cleo having to rescue her puppies from around the vertically scrolling levels filled with spikes and enemies. Bones add bonus points and the paw gives an extra life. There's even a bonus game after each level. Carl also

created the *Strike Team* games for all the *Commando* fans out there, with plenty of enemy guys to slaughter and large military machines to conquer.



DAY TRIP by Simon Reece

What would happen if aliens invaded and people were abducted by UFOs? Simon's excellent comedy game poses this question – and it's time to fight back. Clever

cutscenes created using the Kit add to the atmosphere. Simon's other games include *Lard* (based around a fat lady eating junk food) and *U-R-Reg* (starring a pensioner called Reg, who must walk through a dangerous neighbourhood to collect his pension).

KINGS OF COMEDY by Carsten Manshusen

Take control of silent film legends Charlie Chaplin (using port 2) and Harold Lloyd (port 1) in this slapstick game with some nicely drawn graphics. Chuck custard pies at the enemies, including the Keystone Kops and runaway criminals. Make your way through several locations including the city, the Old West and find The Girl of your dreams. It drew heavily on the demo game *Outlaw* for inspiration, but it works well. For another surreal *SEUCK* experience, check out *Kill Hill* from Art Ravers – starring Harry Hill and his cat Stouffer.

MONSTER MASH by Jon Wells

This game by Jon proves the concept of enhancement, with its title screen, get ready and game over sequences – plus the nice

score panel in the lower border. A choice of music (a beautiful tune by Paul 'Feekzoid' Hannay), sound FX or silence is also available. Take control of a cute dinosaur, set fire to huts and stomp the little people while avoiding other dinosaurs and fiery volcanoes. As usual, large bosses must

WEB LINKS

http://tnd64.unikat.sk/SEUCK_School.html
The *SEUCK School* from Richard Bayliss, helping you enhance games made with the Kit.

http://tnd64.unikat.sk/SEUCK_Redux.html
Martin Piper's *SEUCK Redux* is exp ained in more deta l here

http://seuck.gamesplaygames.co.uk/
The *Sideways SEUCK* editor from Jon We ls for scrolling sideways.

http://www.seuckvault.co.uk/
The *SEUCK Vault* webs te hosts a large archive of games, plus tips and tricks for using the Kit on C64 and Amiga

http://www.binaryzone.org/retrostore/

https://readonlymemory.vg/
Read Only Memory Books created a fantastic and av.shly illustrated book dedicated to the history of Sensible Software. Author Gary Penn interv ewed Jon Hare to reveal just how *SEUCK* and all of Sensible's hit titles were created

also be overcome. Jon also contributed to *Archetype*, another of Alf Yngve's games to be enhanced with potions for the barbarian hero to pick up.

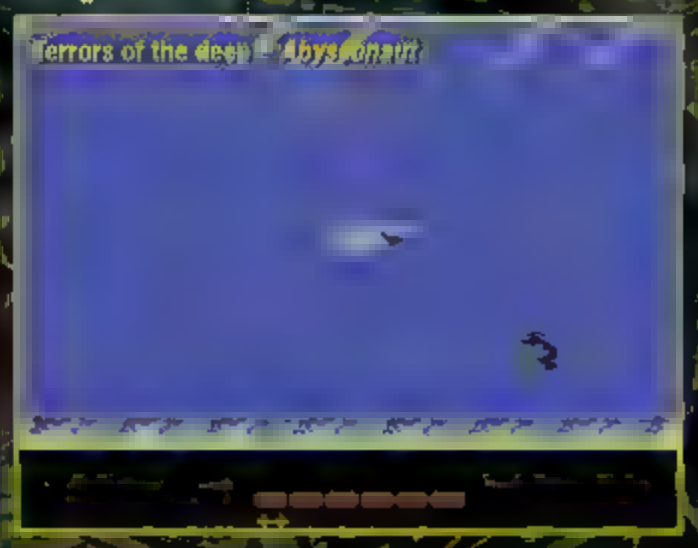
REALMS OF MIDGARD
by Eleanor Burns

Eleanor (formerly known as Anthony) has really mastered the Kit in recent years, creating some unique titles. This is one of the most unusual, with its hi-res graphics creating beautiful maps reminiscent of many a fantasy novel. Queen Malexia sends the galleon Mölnir to the hostile realms of Midgard. The galleon is used to protect the home castle (actually the second-player sprite) and new settlements being built from orcs, knights, siege catapults and more. The changing weather (shown on the map) and volcanoes make the journey even more perilous. To obtain the true ending, the player's castle must survive to the end of the game and then the combination entered correctly into the separate end part to view it. Eleanor's recent *Valkyrie* series also impresses with the World War II setting and incredible graphics.

SOPWITHS & PTERRORDONS
by Anthony Stiller

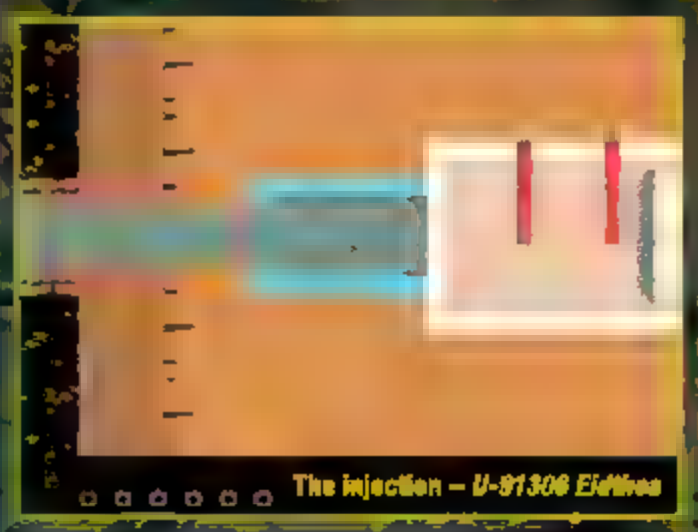
Anthony's first ever *SEUCK* game is a cracker. Pilot a biplane through prehistoric skies, avoiding and shooting the enemies including flying dinosaurs and spear-throwing cavemen. The monolith from 2001 even puts in an

appearance. The detailed backgrounds and clever sprites accompany tricky but well-designed gameplay. Anthony's follow-up *Abyssonaut* is also worth playing, a really fun underwater shoot 'em up with some original design features.



U-91306 EIDOTHEA
by Igor Errazking

Inspired by classic sci-fi film *Fantastic Voyage*, a miniature submarine is injected into a human body infected with alien



parasites. Clever graphical sequences – such as the sub being injected at the start and the X-ray screens between levels – plus the hidden passages to navigate show the thought that has gone into this game. Among Igor's other games are beat 'em up *Retro Pan Pan*, which has an animated intro and huge sprites, and comedy bullfighting 'simulator' Matador '16.

ZOMBIE BRAIN EATERS
by Andy Vaisey

Entered into a competition for *SEUCK* games in 2013, this makes use of *Sideways SEUCK*. Waves of zombies assail the

player in this excellent *Operation Wolf*-style shooter. Survive the day by blasting your way through the Suburbs, the Junkyard, the Sewers and the Subway. Extra touches that work well include the first aid kits, shattering windows and the between-level presentation. For a sci-fi alternative, check out 2013's *Re-Alienator* with its tale of defeating aliens.

ZZAP! 64

THE SCORELORD'S SCORN!

I don't remember actual scores but I can remember finishing *Bubble Bobble* many times with my best mate Adam. Seem to remember the scores were in the millions as we could do it without losing a life and get secret doors. Good times.
Paul Vince

C64anabalt – 5937m
Juha A

Impossible Mission – 29950 (on an emulated Palm Tungsten T3 using Frodo. Sadly I play it every day and have done for a number of years. I usually start again if I get zapped.
Jeremy Shaw

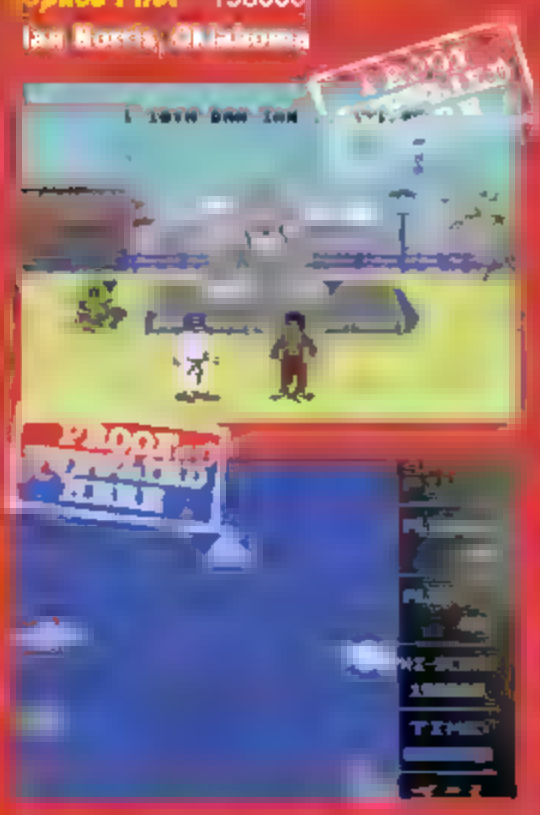
Planet Golf (I really enjoy the game)
Jupiter – 27; Mars – 22
Kepler – 14; Earth – 6
Cameron Jackson

Impossible Mission 2 – 71200 (this was a while back) ZZAP!64 #40 in August 1988.
Andy Dean, South Harrow

Park Patrol – 999999 (After level 99, 999999 score – and 9 lives – the game doesn't display more on screen, so the status bar doesn't get corrupted, but still keeps track of the actual number. As tried by dying several times once reaching there, and having to die some times before the on-screen counter started going down. That's kudos for good coding practice for Tony Ngo/Activision! (Also my then black and white TV set died from overheating after some three hours of playing.
Henrik Isacsson

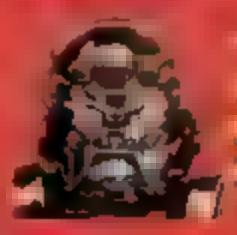
"Must have been a good day for dying..."

Way Of The Exploding Fist – 301700
Space Pilot – 198000
Ian Norris, Oklahoma



Pitfall 2 – 199000; I have done this on C64 and Atari 2600. Also
Zenji – 18730
Daren Wood

The only high score I think I have for a C64 game is for my own game, *Paper Plane*. It's probably of no interest, but my best is 428.
Roy Fielding



"Disgraceful! This is nothing more than a Roy Fielding selfie-promotion."

H.E.R.O. – 193049 (on a VICE C64 emulator, I hope that's okay?)
Adam Wade

"An em-u-lat-or? No, it's not okay. What's wrong with a proper C64? Look at the screenshot all very emulatory..."

Paradroid – 55520
Uridium – 145420
Rambo – 965400 (I deliberately killed myself, as the scores wrap back to zero at 1 million)
Delta – 52270
Impossible Mission – 16506
Green Beret – 75650
Insects In Space – 136710
Hover Bovver – 14289
Big Mac: The Mad Maintenance Man – 156654
Orelbs – 57570
DNA Warrior – 623600

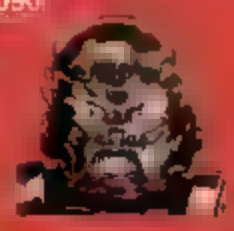
Who Dares Wins – 17040
Lightforce – 35550
Blue Max – 7910
Paul Kissling

Bomb Jack – 445250
Bomberman – 211700
Brain Spasm – 100150
Crillion '93 – 312742
Hi Ska De – 25625
Hunter's Moon – 48650
Jim Slim – 56954
Manic Miner – 22174

Mr Robot and his Robot Factory – 118190

Omidar – 32467

Poster Paster – 63050
Rabbit Pie – 32215
Ranarama – 1078400
Spike – 66250
Split Personalities – 650500
Tooth Invaders – 40090
Wizard – 340750
Alex, Germany



"Alex(andra) says she isn't a guy, but hopes it's okay to send in hi-scores... Hmmmmmm..."

Choplifter – 61
Commando Arcade SE – 120800
Decathlon – 11328
Defender – 992850
Hover Bovver – 22813
IK+ – 157100
International Karate – 70600
Mario Bros. – 231320
Popeye – 136080
Raid On Bungeling Bay 58550
Test Drive II – 335100
Track & Field – 995900
Who Dares Wins – 60470
Wizard Of Wor – 151700
Pasi

Wizard of Wor – 268300
BC's Quest For Tires – 3160
BR Ville/Warrior1

Bubble Bobble – 2195650
Rainbow Islands – 4794350
Denaris – 489980 (both sent to C&VG #107 and #108)
John Kavanagh

It's December 1982 and at that moment I'm 9 years old. In The Netherlands we celebrate Sinterklaas on the 5th of December.
During Sinterklaas of 1982 I got a special present of my parents, Bep Luijenga and Theo de Vrede.

I got a Commodore 64. This 8 bit machine fired my interest in computers.

At first there were not many titles so you had to program yourself reading the manuals.

As a kid I had to read German and English as there were no Dutch manuals or articles in the beginning.

I also remember going to buy the ZZAP!64 magazine at a local shop. The owner was amazed that a little kid like me was buying these English magazines. I want to thank ZZAP!64 for their awesome 64 coverage during many years.

I want to thank Raymond van Hoorn for having an Atari during our 8 bit era so we could enjoy both machines.
Later on we both got an Amiga.

www.ramonddevrede.nl/zzap64

I want to thank my parents for buying my first computer. They supported my hobby very well.

I will never forget this. Even today I still have my original C64. It still works fine.

The Interview

Helping to Keep the C64 Afloat

THE STORY OF pond SOFTWARE

Thirty-six years since the release of our beloved games behemoth, it seems remarkable that software houses exist that still develop and release new commercial games for it. But exist they do, and ZZAP! foot slogger GRAEME MASON goes in search of the story of one of them . . .

Pond Software began in 2016 when Norwegian Commodore fan Vanja Utne began discussing an idea for a game with her friend, Andreas Gustafsson. 'Andreas asked me if I could draw some asteroid sprites for an intro he was coding,' begins Vanja. 'While I was doing that, I drew a little green alien in a space suit as well.' When the Swedish coder saw the alien, he suggested they pool their talents and create a game together, featuring the creature, now dubbed Spaceman Splorf. Having already released games under Andreas' SDW Developments label, they decided Vanja should form her own label. Recalling an old logo she had drawn on the Amiga back in 1991, Vanja subsequently created Pond Software. 'I thought it would be an amusing name to use,' she explains, 'and shortly after it grew into a proper team with Roy Fielding, Graham Axten, Craig Derbyshire, Anthony Stiller, Tom Roger Skauen and Andreas.'

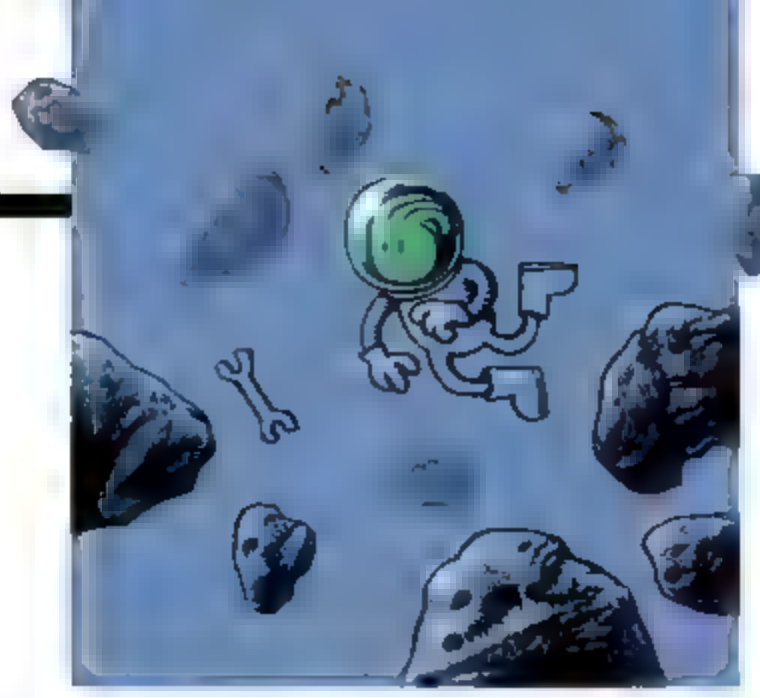
> "The games Ocean released were a bit of a mixed bag…But they did release a lot of great games, and I always loved their loaders."

Vanja bought her first Commodore 64 back in 1986. 'I managed to talk my mum and dad into letting me spend all my savings on it. It came with a joystick and *Radar Rat Race* on cartridge. My parents bought me a datasette and a four-game compilation, and when one of my cousins got an Amiga, I bought his 1541 disk drive.' 32 years later, Vanja incredibly retains the exact same set-up, including some of the boxes. But of course, back then it was all about the games, just as it is today. 'The very first C64

Master Turpin features in *Winky Blinky* by Roy Fielding and Vanja Utne, a 'silly little game to test your C64 reaction skills.

games I played were *Wizard Of Wor* and *Jumpman Junior*, on a friend's computer, and then classics such as *Pitstop II* and *Raid Over Moscow*.' And, as we'd expect at ZZAP! Towers, our beloved periodical featured regularly in Vanja's life growing up. 'An older friend used to buy ZZAP!64 and I'd borrow them before I began buying it myself. I loved all of it – the reviews, portraits of the reviewers, Compunet pages, covers, Rockford, Terminal Man, everything. I wasn't a big fan of the later issues, with the cartoony reviewer portraits, but I kept buying the magazine whenever I could find it.' Today, her ZZAP! collection is almost complete and naturally, ZZAP!'s collective chest bursts with pride.

Vanja's decision to develop for the Commodore 64 was an easy one for her 'I am obviously a bit biased, but having worked on several 8-bit platforms in the past, I must say the C64 is my favourite – it's extremely versatile, has flexible hardware sprites and a multitude of memory efficient graphic modes that make it fairly easy to write 2D games for.' While also acknowledging some of the computer's drawbacks, such as the slow 6502 CPU, Vanja proclaims that the powerful VIC-II and SID features more than make up for it 'Plus it has also got numbers on its side – with so many units sold over the years, there's a large and awesome community, with loads of free crossdev tools, which makes it easy to start making games.'



Spaceman Splorf tackles the asteroids, artwork above, Intro screen right and running sprites below.

A quick glance at the Pond Software logo and it's impossible not to discern its famous origin. 'The name was meant as both a tribute to Ocean Software and as a statement of who we are,' explains Vanja. 'They were a great big ocean. We are just a tiny pond, and the Ocean logo is such an iconic thing.' Vanja was initially unsure about using the homage, before Roy Fielding persuaded her to stick with it, rather than design a completely unique image. 'The games Ocean released were a bit of a mixed bag,' notes Vanja of the famous Manchester software house. As much as ZZAP! admired Ocean back in the day, we can't help but agree. 'But they did release a lot of great games, and I always loved their loaders. I used to load the tape games sometimes just to listen to the loader music!' With the kind permission of Ocean veteran Paul Hughes, Pond uses the same loader in its own tape games, although naturally replacing the classic tunes with its own.

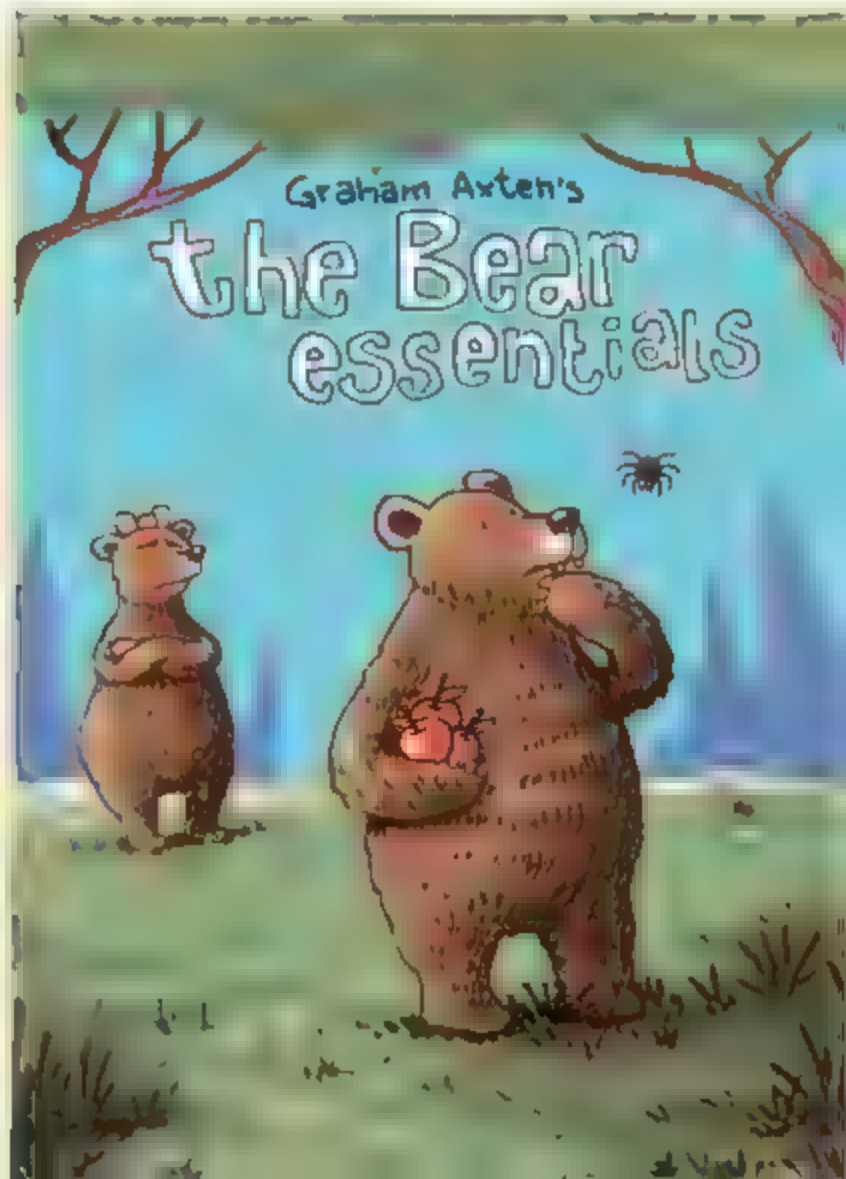
Pond's first game was *Spaceman Splorf: Planet Of Doom*. Taking charge of the eponymous repairman, there's a problem with the disintegration fence above the ominously-titled Planet Doom. It's been hit by rogue asteroids, and Splorf is despatched to repair the fence by commander Splix. This proves to be the easy bit. Chasing after his errant spanner, our brave hero soon finds himself stranded on the deadly planet.

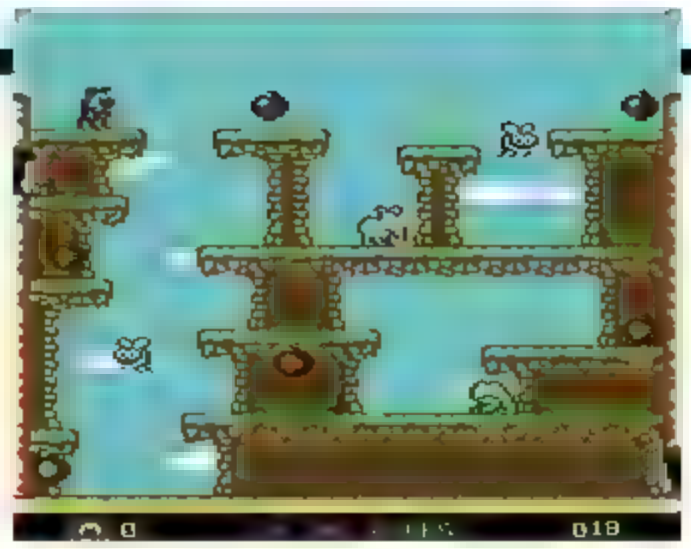
There's nothing complex about *Spaceman Splorf*, it's a simple score attack game, where the object is to guide the main character across the surface of Doom, avoiding meteors and other flying obstacles But thanks to its charming cartoon graphics and fantastic tunes (that are a touch reminiscent of sci-fi classics such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Hitchhikers Guide To The Universe*), it proved popular with fans of the Commodore 64 and retro gaming in general.

'I think the simplicity is what makes *Splorf*,' smiles Vanja. 'It's a casual high-score chaser that you can pick up and play when you have a spare five minutes.' As part of Pond's ongoing commitment to its fans, the game is still being updated too. Just recently, Andreas has improved the random seed for the game's asteroids and varied the starfield that scrolls in the background. 'We're not planning on adding anything to it, though, as it would harm the original nature of the game,' says Vanja, 'Although if all things go as planned, you'll see Splorf return in bigger and more complex games one day.'

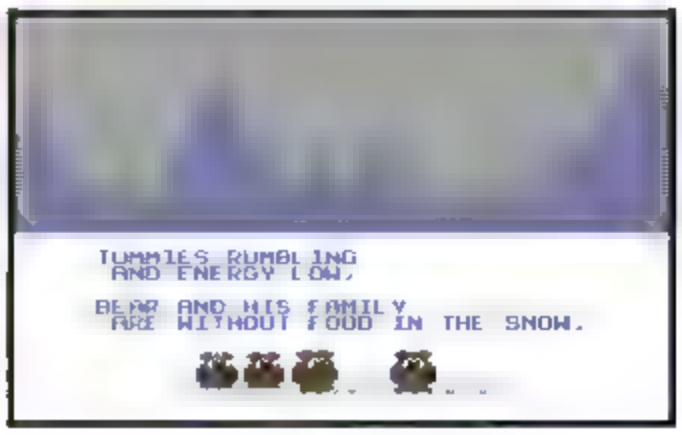
The fact Pond decided to distribute the game freely probably helped *Splorf*'s success, too, and even today Pond is a strict non-profit venture. 'There are three main reasons why we are non-profit,' explains Vanja. 'We wanted to keep this a fun thing to do, a hobby, and to avoid having it feel like a job. Plus we want to keep the physical releases affordable, so as many people as possible feel they can afford to buy them. And finally, the third reason, is that organisations such as Free The Bears need the money much more than we do.' Free The Bears is a charity that is close to Vanja's heart, and one that Pond is proud to support. Throughout many countries in Asia, bears are mistreated terribly, mainly as a source of ingredients for local medicines 'They are trapped in tiny cages and used for 'bile farming',' says Vanja sadly. 'Dirty catheters are inserted directly into their gall bladder to 'milk' their bile. Free The Bears works not only to free captured bears, but also to change the attitudes to the wildlife trade in Asia.' It's a very noble and caring cause, and Pond's goal is to sponsor rescued bears for as long as it can.

After the success of *Spaceman Splorf*, fans began to request an actual physical release from Pond. This came in the form of *The Bear Essentials* in 2016, written entirely by Graham Axten and featuring ... Bear. Poor old Bear is in hot water after a lazy summer and must gather hundreds of apples in order to keep his family fed during the winter. Unfortunately the nearby forest is inhabited by all sorts of strange creatures, including a dangerous abandoned mine.



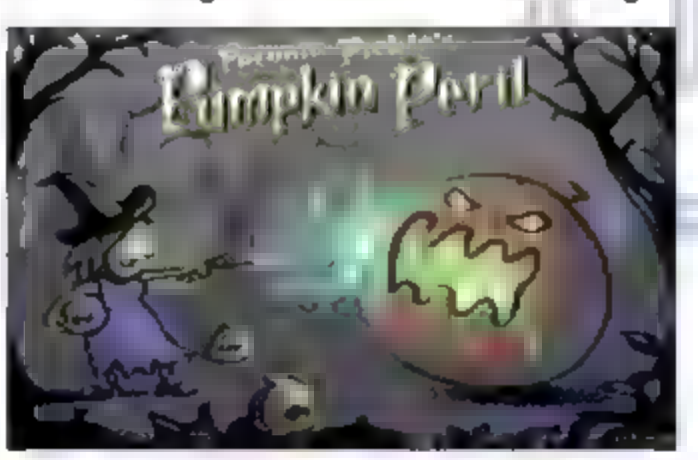


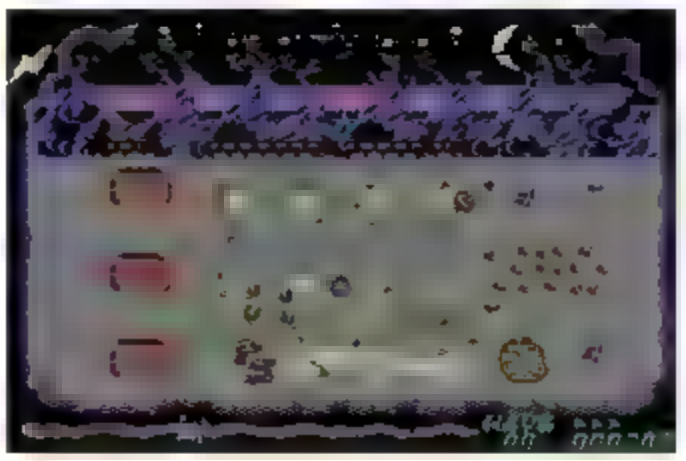
Vanja's painting of Bear playing on a C64, a *Bear* in-game screen above and the terrible cost of failure below.



> "Sourcing tapes and disks is no problem – I've also got thousands of new old-stock floppy disks, and we take care of tape and disk duplication ourselves."

The move to physical products increased the workload on Vanja, making the production of new releases a balancing act. 'My bedroom and office is full of Pond stuff and materials,' she says. 'Because we're spread out all over the world, there's no easy way of dividing up this particular part of the work between us. I don't mind though, as it gives the others more time to work on the actual games. It does mean that sometimes things get delayed depending on how much is going on in my life – but people have been very understanding so far.' And the move inevitably brings up other issues, although perhaps not the ones you'd imagine, as Vanja tells. 'Sourcing tapes and disks is no problem – I've also got thousands of new old-stock floppy disks, and we take care of the tape and disk duplication ourselves. But one big initial problem was finding cases for the floppy disks. I wanted something slim in order to keep the shipping costs down, and we ended up using these jewel cases that are used as calendar cases, so they are mass-produced and can be bought relatively cheaply in bulk.' Without doubt for Vanja, the biggest challenge remains the amount of actual work involved, designing, assembling and packaging each physical game. But it's a challenge she still enjoys. 'For most of us, the C64 was our first computer, so it's something special to us. Breathing life into the little game characters and building a world around them, there's something magical about that. Making a game within the limits of the computer, and the sense of achievement when it all comes together is a great feeling. And as long as we continue to get good feedback that people are enjoying our games, we shall continue.'





Petunia Pickle and her Familiar ride the broomstick like Quidditch pros; title and in-game screen right above, Vanja's cover art far right.

Hive of industry

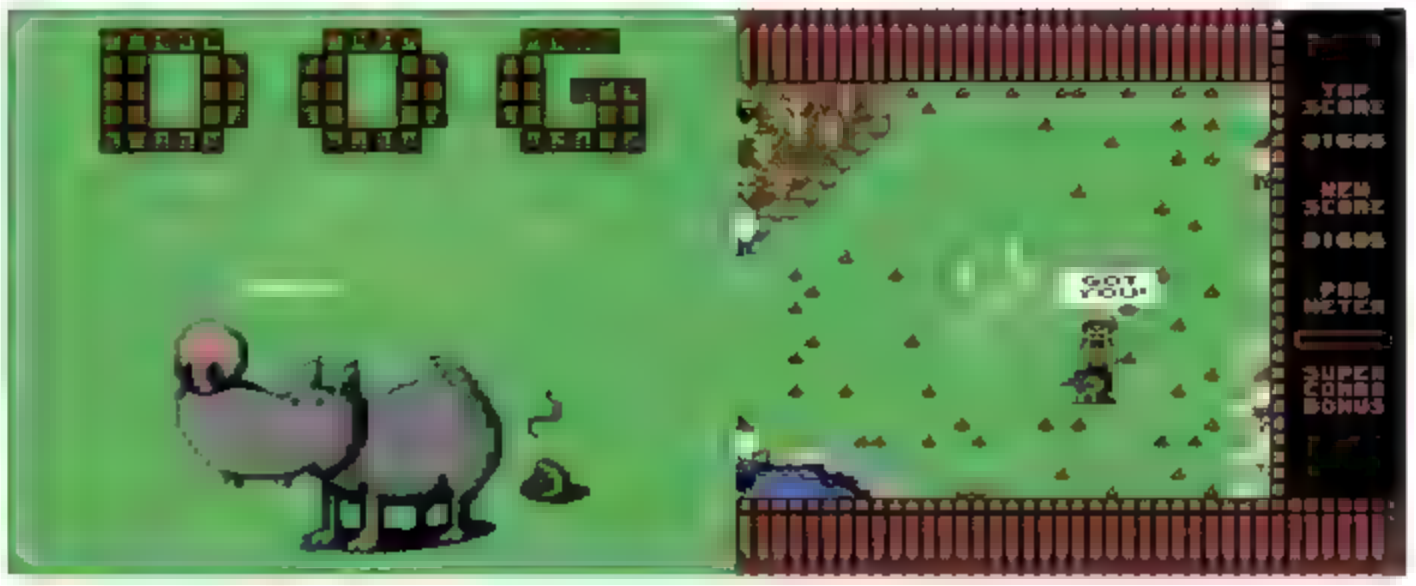
There are many projects in the works for Pond as Vanja and the team continue to source and create games. 'For me, this means tape and disk duplication, cutting, folding, gluing, stapling, packing and trips to the post office!' she grins. 'But the spirit and tradition of the bedroom coder, and what the dev teams, and other publishers, are doing is a huge inspiration for us. Many of the new games are just as good, or better than a lot of the games from the past, and the packaging very professional. I'm always excited to see what comes up next!'

For Pond itself, in addition to new Commodore 64 games, exploration of other platforms remains on the agenda. Says

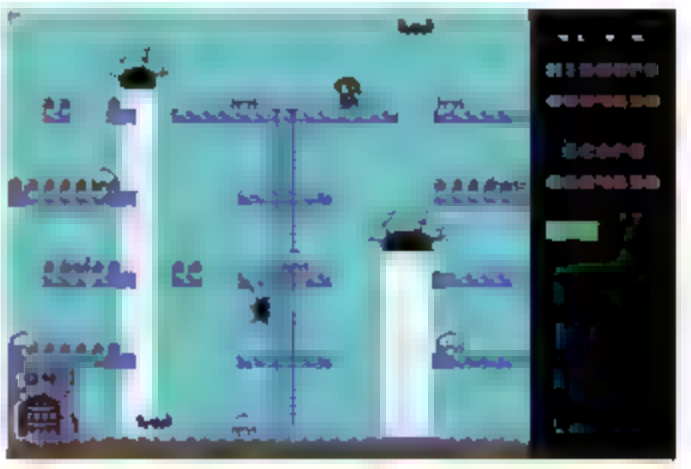
Coming soon to a multiplex garden near you, the spritely hero of *A Snail's Tale* by Graham Axten.

Vanja, 'Our main focus will always be the C64, but that won't stop us releasing to other systems Andreas and I have already ported *Spaceman Splorf* to the Atari 2600 and Philips Videopac G7000, and thanks to companies such as Packrat that take care of the cartridge duplication, there will be physical versions available for purchase.' Amazingly, Pond's Roy Fielding has even converted *Splorf* to the Pico-8 Fantasy console, and there are plans to release a shoot-'em-up for the Swedish Z80-based Luxor ABC 80 computer. But in the near future, a C64 tape and disk version of *Spaceman Splorf* is imminent, followed by the delightfully-named *Petunia Pickle's Pumpkin Peril* (by Anthony Stiller), *Iceblox Plus* (Karl Hörnell) and *Hibernated 1: This Place is Death* from Stefan Vogt (reviewed on page 37 by our ol' White Wizard). 'And thanks to our friends at RGCD, *Spaceman Splorf* will get a cartridge release as well,' reveals Vanja proudly.

The future looks bright for Pond. Here at ZZAP! Towers we look forward to many more colourful and wonderful games from Vanja and her team.

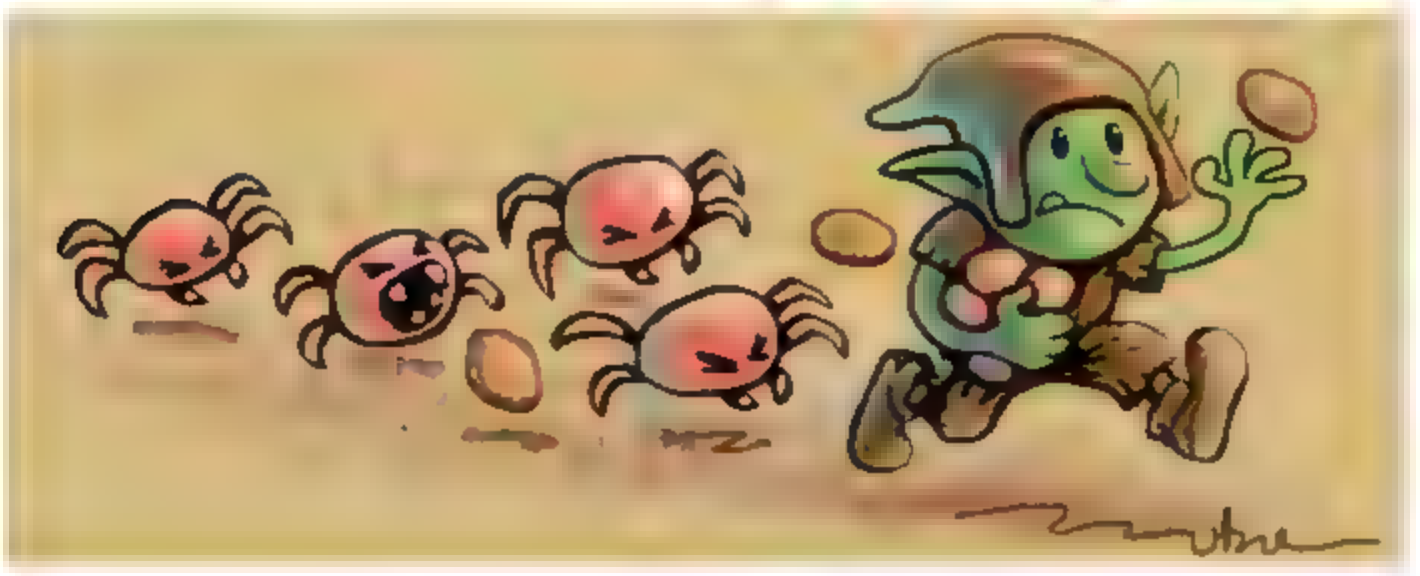


Foodie graphics above in as yet unnamed 'Candy' platformer; tricky puzzler *C64C01Quiz* on the right requires fast reactions and knowledge of hex codes; below it the C64 version of maddening iOS/Android game *Swing Copters*.

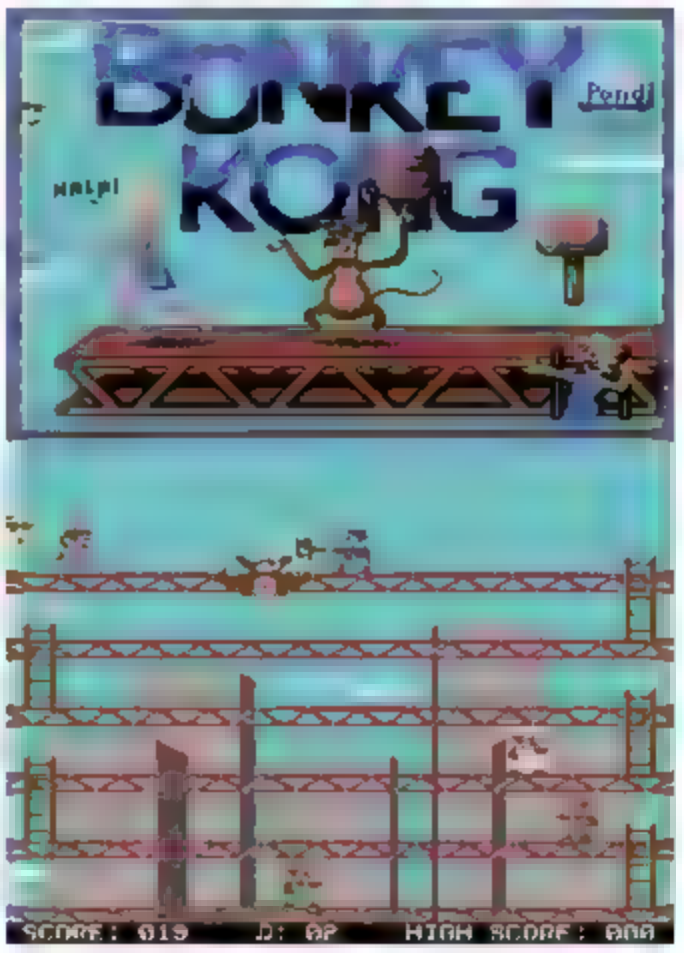


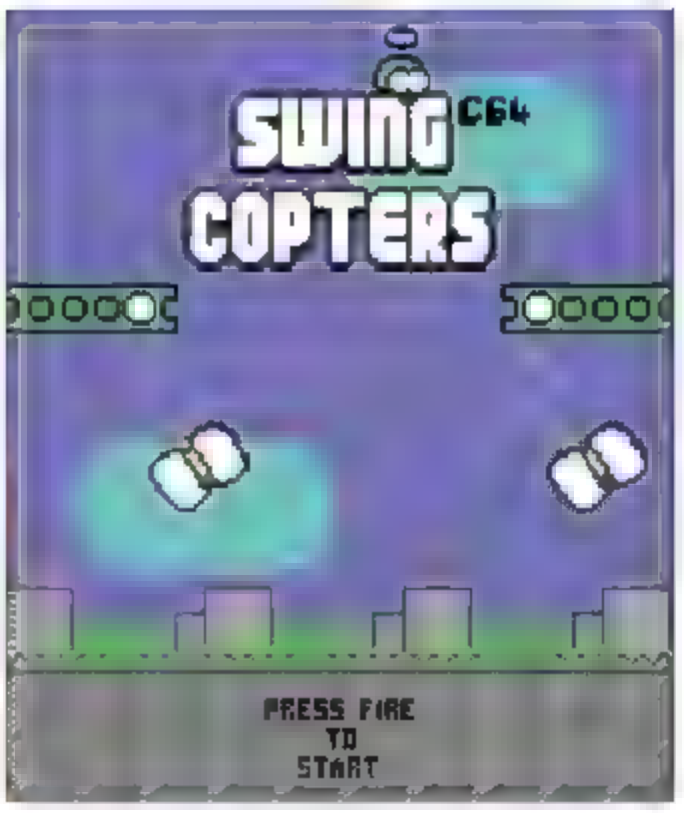
Colourful graphics in Roy Fielding's *Humpy!* about a man hungry for mushrooms in Stumpy's forbidden cave.

Goblin flees from the potato bugs. Vanja's concept art for *Goblin* and an in-game *Goblin* screen right above.



In Vanja Utne's tasteful presentation *Dog* you run around a 'shouty' man's garden and poo all over the place . . . while in *Super Ski* (Andreas Gustafsson and Vanja Utne) just avoid getting piste in the fearsome downhill. Graham Axten's *Bonkey Kong* below probably speaks for itself!





Inside the THEC64 MINI

In 2016 Paul Andrews, Darren Melbourne and Chris Smith joined forces to create a new, modern incarnation of the C64. Chris Smith takes up the story of THEC64 Mini

Darren was previously behind the original C64-DTV, which was truly a C64 in a joystick, right down to generating a composite video signal. Unfortunately its custom microchip implementation meant that it could not be upgraded or modified after production, and the large upfront cost required to tool up the semiconductor plant before a single chip was produced was relatively prohibitive, plus there was always the risk that the chip wouldn't work. Our user research told us that customers wanted HDMI with an easy to use user interface (UI), as well as being upgradable with new features after purchase. These and several other factors made a hybrid hardware-software (emulation) approach far more cost effective, flexible and maintainable.

Summer 2016

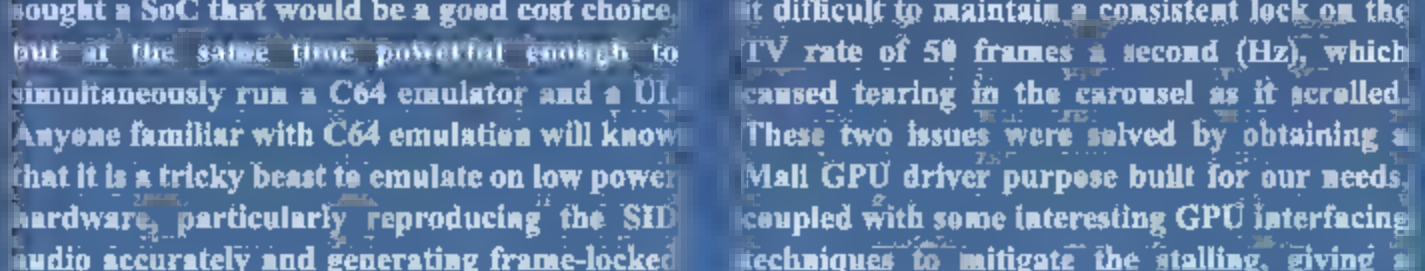
Once we had carried out some technical viability tests, work on THEC64Mini began. The first step was to select an appropriate single-chip computer or System-on-a-Chip (SoC) to run our intended software. We sought a SoC that would be a good cost choice, but at the same time powerful enough to simultaneously run a C64 emulator and a UI. Anyone familiar with C64 emulation will know that it is a tricky beast to emulate on low power hardware, particularly reproducing the SID audio accurately and generating frame-locked flicker and tear-free video. Ultimately we tried several SoC evaluation boards from different manufacturers and found that the cost effective AllWinner A20 (a dual core ARM Cortex-A7) was powerful enough to run an emulator along with a custom UI, as long as we were very careful with our software design. By February 2017 we had enough pieces in place to start developing for production.

February–December 2017

The production firmware took around ten months to develop and finished on the 1 December 2017, the deadline for manufacture. It was a complicated piece of work due to a number of challenges. Ideally we would have used a standard toolkit as the core of our UI as that would have theoretically reduced the amount of code we needed to write and test. In practice we found we lost some critical performance using such a toolkit, which defeated the point of using it. In the end we created a small software library to efficiently handle the interaction with the GPU, and a menu system to sit on top of that. We also found that it was very easy to stall the GPU, leading to delayed frames which would manifest themselves most visibly as jerky scrolling of the game selection carousel. This in part made it difficult to maintain a consistent lock on the TV rate of 50 frames a second (Hz), which caused tearing in the carousel as it scrolled. These two issues were solved by obtaining a Mali GPU driver purpose built for our needs, coupled with some interesting GPU interfacing techniques to mitigate the stalling, giving a super smooth HDMI output.

One of the most interesting aspects of the firmware development was that of designing and user testing the UI. We went through several iterations of this refinement process, but fundamentally the UI remained close to our original concepts. It incorporates several important design elements, such as the safe zone around the outside of the screen to cater for TVs that crop the image, iconic features from the C64 such as the light and dark blue colour scheme to invoke that C64 'feel', and a careful blending of both crisp modern and pixelated retro elements.

ROBOTO BOLD 40PT



The early layout proposal for THEC64 Mini'a UI, keepin gthe original light and dark blue colour scheme and safe zone. Above: 3D printed white plastic prototype case after painting.

March–April 2017

For part of March and April, I took time out from developing the firmware to create THEC64 Mini's case CAD models. This started by disassembling a C64 case and measuring every angle and distance. Something you learn from doing this is why a case looks the way it does. It all comes down to reliable production. For example, within the mould the horizontal part of the upper case is the keyboard face, not the top grille face. This is so the internal sides of the keyboard cut-out are parallel to the key action. In keeping with good mould design, Commodore applied a slight outward slope to all vertical case sides to ensure the case drops out of the mould cleanly without marking. You can see this sloping if you lay a C64 case top upside down on its keyboard. The consequence of all this is that when you orientate the case normally, so the top grille is horizontal, the slope of the back face is quite pronounced. This looks very stylish and deliberate but is just an artefact of making the mould work.

March–December 2017

Throughout this period, Paul and his media team created the Mini visual assets, such as you see on the box, manual, website, along with the PEGI (Pan European Game Information) review assets and promotional

videos. This work was carried out closely with our distribution partnership Koch Media, in particular Stuart Chiplin who, among other things, coordinated the needs and managed the expectations of each distribution territory.

May 2017

Ben Jones at our distribution partner Koch Media expertly managed the day-to-day engagement with our Chinese manufacturer.

THEC64 Mini under development – it doesn't much resemble a small Commodore 64 yet . . .

This excellent arrangement allowed me to concentrate on product development instead of management, however early in our relationship with the manufacturer we realised they were lacking some insight into our product technology needs. We had supplied them with complete schematics and partial PCB layouts for them to complete and send us pre-production boards. However, they appeared to almost ignore what we were sending them and instead suggested technology and designs they had already produced. This is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly if they have cheaper viable alternatives, but the suggestions were nowhere near powerful enough and some didn't have USB. In the end, and at a moment's notice, I flew to China for the weekend to sit with them and take them through the high level design a step at a time, so they could understand how we arrived at using the A20 chip, and what design needs had to be met. Despite the language barrier, there was an unmistakable moment when a light-bulb went on.

June 2017

Six or so weeks after my weekend city break to China, I received the first prototype PCBs back from them. Despite still needing some work, a majority of the necessary design features were in place, and were enough to start using them for firmware development instead of the chip evaluation boards.

July 2017

Once the case and joystick CAD designs were complete we began pre-production: creating the stainless steel moulds from the CAD designs. The first step was to produce highly accurate 3D printed test models from the CAD to tease out any design or aesthetic issues, before starting the expensive job of milling the moulds. A month later we received the first real plastics. These were for quality checking, and even though these were incomplete (the smooth surfaces were not yet polished, for example) they were good enough to reveal a small number of issues common in first-runs. Luckily we had no issues with plastic sag, pitting or warping, which are also common. The factory in China also came up with a neat way of printing the white key text onto the keyboard plate, by moulding the keyboard in white plastic, spraying it brown and then etching away the paint with a laser to leave white letters.

July–November 2017

While firmware, hardware design and plastic pre-production were under way, Darren was licensing games. Each game sourced was evaluated for quality. It was particularly difficult to find original copies that had not been hacked or altered in some way. Each game was individually configured by the team, mapping any keyboard keys used to buttons on the joystick, and creating description texts for the UI, which were translated into five languages. Once the game library was complete and thoroughly tested, it was submitted to PEGI for official age rating.

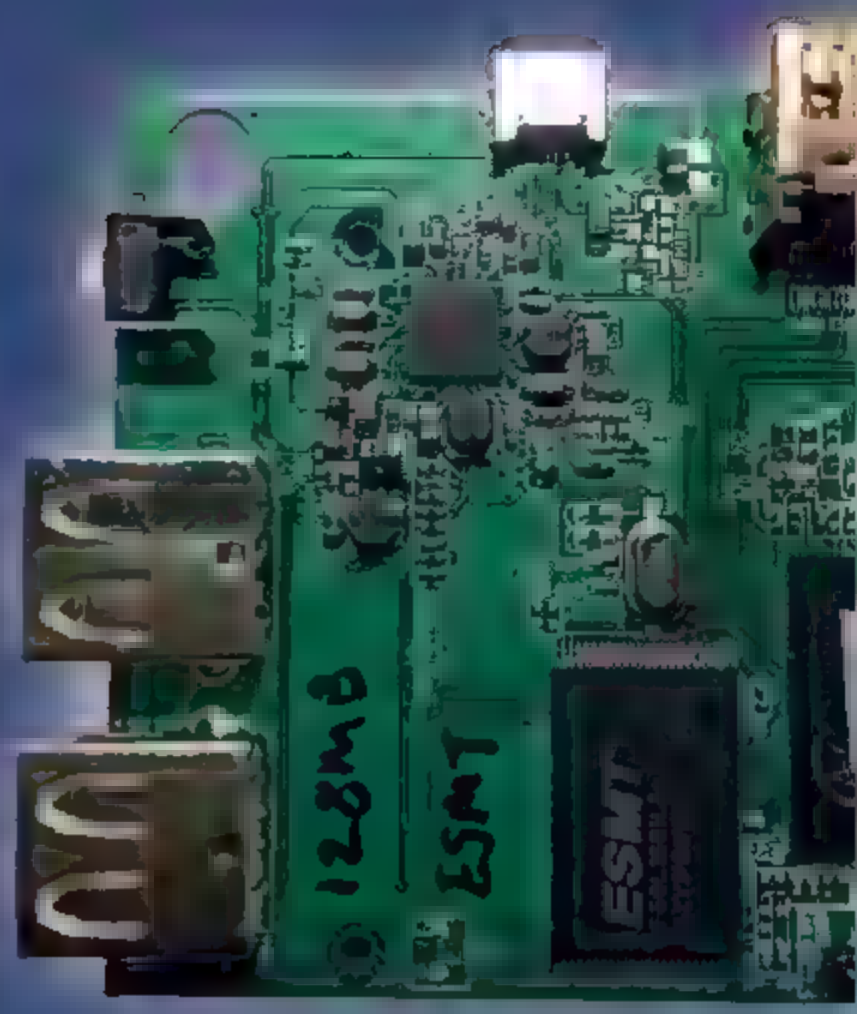
3D printed case and joystick made in China. Above right: the printed circuit board.

September–November 2017

Between September and November the moulds were finalised and received the polishing required to create the smooth shiny plastic finish where necessary. The team in China identified quality issues as they ran test batches and made adjustments as they went.

November 2017

Due to cost, we needed to use a small capacity 128MB flash chip to store the Mini's game library and firmware;



however the proprietary flash driver provided by the SoC manufacturer (AllWinner) would not work with these chips. Thankfully AllWinner were really helpful, and created a custom driver that met our needs.

December 2017–January 2018

Full production started on Boxing Day 2017, with the first containers of THEC64 Mini leaving the factory on the 19th January 2018 and heading by sea to our distribution partner's warehouse in Austria. From here the Minis were dispatched to retail ready for release.

29th March 2018

The official release of THEC64 Mini.

April–June 2018

Between April and June 2018 we worked on building a 60Hz version of the Mini, going into production in June. Even though modern televisions in North America will generally support frame rates of 50 and 60Hz, there are some that are restricted to the old US standard of 60Hz. It was therefore desirable that the Mini worked at 60Hz in North America. Given that the C64 was originally available in both 50 and 60Hz variants, and that games generally expected to run with the frame rate common for the country in which they were written and sold, we took the decision to produce the Mini in two variants. In doing so, both North American and European users get the experience they would have got using a regional C64, and it also allowed us to tailor the game library slightly to include a larger proportion of US games for the North American market.

Working at ZZAP! 64 by those who did it daily...

Jaz Rignall
Paul Glancey
Phil King and
Robin Hogg (among
others) layed it
out. Nicholas Lea
was Publisher at
EMAP. ZZAP!64
Editorial Offices

When putting together an issue of ZZAP!64 magazine, the first order of business was to compile the flatplan. This critical document was the definitive guide to the magazine – it listed what was on every page, from the editorial to the advertising.

First of all, we consulted the sales department to get their best estimate as to how many advertising pages they thought they could sell in that particular month. That essentially dictated the issue's extent – the more adverts the sales team sold, the larger the issue was going to be. In the summer, when new games releases were thinner on the ground, the magazine tended to be close to 100 pages in size, whereas in the winter when games releases ramped up, so did the size of the magazine – sometimes close to 200 pages.

While filling out the flatplan sounds relatively straightforward, the process was made fiendishly complex due to the way that magazines are printed. Basically, a magazine is printed in sections of 16 pages, but they are not continuous. For example, section one of a magazine actually represents the first eight pages and its final eight pages (because of the way magazines are printed, folded, and stapled); section two represents pages eight to 16, and the penultimate eight pages. Additional sections are added until the middle 16 pages of the magazine is reached, and that completes the flatplan. Sounds complicated? It was. Different sections were sent to the printers at different times – usually starting from the middle of the magazine, working outwards. Since section one was the 'outside' of the magazine, it was always the final section to be sent off, which is why there are often news pages at the front of the magazine, and previews right at the back – it gave us the maximum amount of time to put those pages together, meaning we could insert last-minute previews or news.

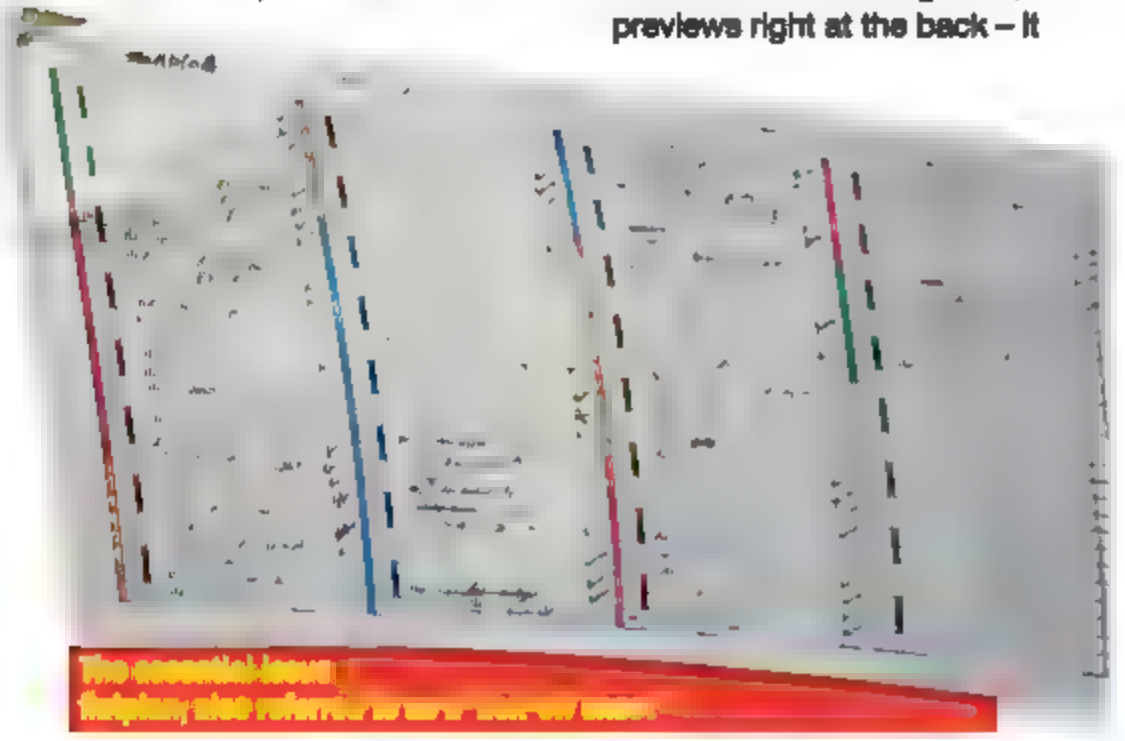


Photo: Jaguar Land

At the beginning of the month, the flatplan was fairly fluid. Certain pages were pretty much set in stone – the editorial, contents, Top 10 charts, and letters pages were all regular features that we knew would always be in the magazine – but as ad pages were sold (or sometimes not), and unexpected new games came in for review (or were delayed until the following month), we constantly tweaked the flatplan. Sometimes we made more space for games that we really liked and wanted to feature in a two- or even three-page review, and cut down reviews of games that we thought were going to be good but weren't up to a single or half page. As the month wore on, the flatplan gradually firmed up until the final week of production, when everything was pretty much nailed down. But even then, there might still be some last-minute changes. Perhaps an ad was cancelled at the last moment, leaving us a page or two to fill with editorial, or we might get a really good game in for a preview or review that we just *had* to have in the magazine. We'd basically parlay with the advertising department and figure it all out at the last moment. It was pretty stressful, but fortunately despite making numerous changes at the eleventh hour, the ZZAP! team never missed its deadline.

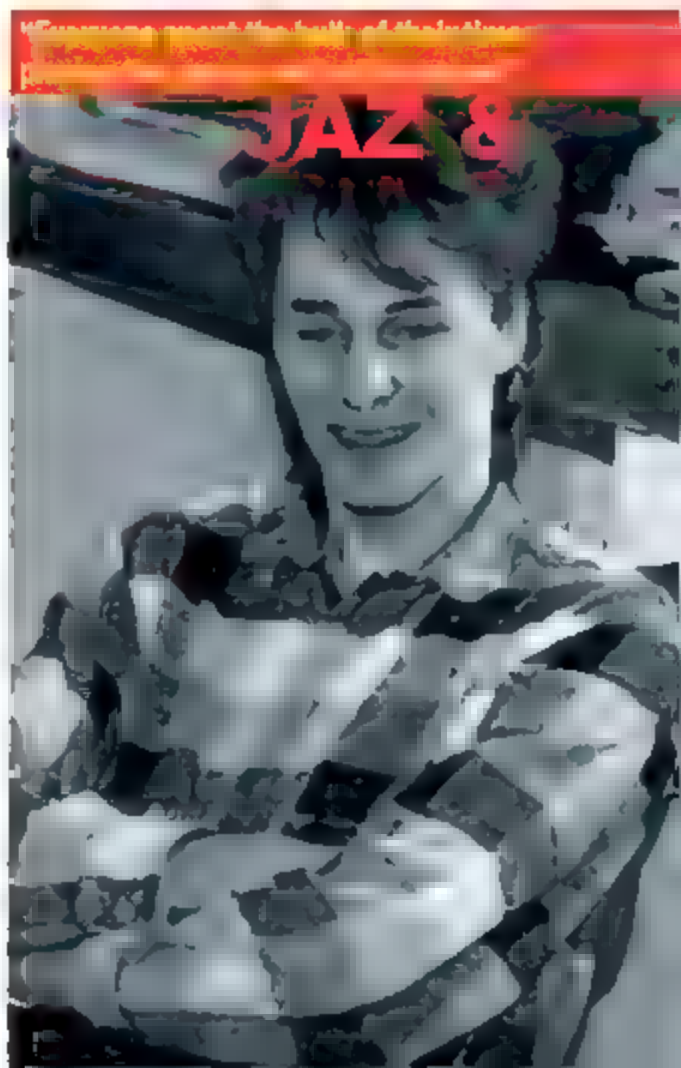
> **"I think that ZZAP! generally struck the right balance between the volume of ads and editorial"**

Sometimes there would be arguments over page positions and allotments. The ad sales department always wanted as many right-hand pages as possible early on in the magazine. That's because they were worth more to advertisers than left-hand pages (right-hand pages are the first to catch your eye when you turn a page). However, us editorial folks wanted to avoid having too many consecutive right-hand advertising pages because it reflected poorly on the editorial, so there was always a bit of a compromise. Fortunately, though, I think that ZZAP! generally struck the right balance between the volume of ads and editorial, and I don't remember there ever being a lot of reader complaints about there being too many ads and not enough editorial in the magazine.

The cover creation process was one of my favorite aspects of putting an issue together. Sometimes we knew well ahead of time what we wanted to put on the cover – we might have an exclusive deal with a company over a game we particularly liked the look of – but at other times we'd decide what was going on the cover over the course of the month as games came in for review. Once we had picked the cover game, I went upstairs to talk to Oli Frey about what we wanted, and discussed various ideas about how he could best depict the game. It was always a fun conversation, and we bandied plenty of concepts about until we settled on a final vision for the cover. At that point, Oli got out his paints and airbrush and started working on it. I was always surprised at how quickly Oli painted – when he was working at speed, he could crank out a brilliant cover in a day or two.

Photo: Roger Kean

The process of making a magazine is cyclical. Things start out fairly relaxed, and then get increasingly busier and more stressful as the month wears on. The first week of production was generally slow as we figured out



what would be in the issue, and everyone spent the bulk of their time playing the games we had to review. Week two was when things began to solidify, and the actual writing of the magazine really began in earnest. Stuff like letters pages, tips, and features

"For the most part we usually had fairly similar opinions on the games that we reviewed . . ."

were created during this time. Then the third week would roll around, and things started getting seriously stressful. At this point, reviews had to be completed and scored, screenshots taken, examined, and properly attributed to the correct pages, and certain sections of the magazine completed and sent off to the printers. Then came the fourth week of production – always utterly crazy. Last-minute reviews, news, previews, potential corrections, and the cover were all completed during this time, put through the in-house art and production guys and sent off to the printers . . . and then it was back to week one, trying to catch a breath before we started over again on the next issue.

Something that precipitated lively debate during the process of putting a magazine together was scoring reviews. *ZZAP!*'s ratings weren't an average of the three reviewers' scores, but were instead something that we discussed together until we reached a number that everyone was happy with. For the most part we had fairly similar opinions on the games in review, only arguing over a potential swing of a few points here and there. But sometimes a game came along that we really couldn't agree on – a classic example being *Delta* by Thalamus. I remember Gary Penn absolutely hating it, I loved it, and Steve Jarratt was somewhere in the middle. We went back and forth on it for what seemed like days until we settled on a score that nobody was particularly happy with: 74%. Funnily enough, the readers also seemed to be split on the game. Some felt it was a classic, while others didn't like it at all ■

Photo: Roger Kean

Working on ZZAP!64 was one of the best times in my life, but now – 30 years later – when I look back at that time I wonder how on earth we did what we did.

I was a callow youth of 18 when I arrived at Newsfield in January 1988, on the same day as Gordon Houghton and Mark Caswell. Gordon and I were hired to be staff writers on ZZAP! and (poor) Mark went to Crash.

I'd already visited the office twice for my two interviews, but as a long-time reader it was still dazzling to be in the same room as Julian Rignall and Steve Jarratt, with Roger and Oli breezing through. I remember asking where Lloyd Mangram sat; I was told he was away. There were sagging shelves full of old Sizzlers and Gold Medal disks lining the walls, the carpet was tea-stained, the 'desks' were of varying shapes and sizes and there was a large whiteboard with pornographic graffiti on it. Oh yes. This was The Dream Factory.

Over the coming months Jaz and Steve taught Gordon and I how to be Newsfield games journalists. How to write reviews in the ZZAP! style and how to rate games to the ZZAP! standards; who were the best people to call at Ocean, US Gold, Gremlin and Activision to get review software; what not to say to visiting

If you've already flicked through the pages of this month's mag, you might have spotted a new face – he's 18-year-old Paul Glancey, a Geordie from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne who has joined ZZAP! as a [redacted].

He's a very enthusiastic games player (he wouldn't be here if he wasn't) and has a big software collection ('they're all original'). His favourites include *Wizball*, *Buggy Boy*, *Encounter*, *Elite* and *Mercenary*, 'but I like anything really' . . . His big claim to fame is that he used to go to the same school as

software house dignitaries; whose calls weren't worth taking; who were ZZAP!'s friends, and who were the enemies who had shafted us out of exclusives so that they could give them to *Computer & Video Games* or those stiffs at *Commodore User*. And how magazines were actually supposed to be produced to a schedule.

For the first couple of days after we'd put an issue to bed we went into Recovery Mode, when we re-played some of the better games we'd just reviewed, mooched about *The Games Machine*'s office to play

'Short of stature but strong of language' – Karl the runner acting as a ZZAP! mail order clothes horse.

Neil Tennant and Sting (so he keeps telling us), and he once saw Mirandhina in the street! Wow!

Connections with the famous aside, he enjoys soothing melodies and is keen film buff with an affinity for sci-fi, good comedy and classic French films . . .

I hope you all make him feel very welcome!

on their PC Engine, drank tea, ran confectionery errands to De Gray's across the road or Victoria Wines downstairs and wondered what to put in the next issue.

As staff writers, the day usually began with mail-sorting. Every day, Karl (short of stature but strong of language) dragged in a mightily bulging mail sack containing parcels of new games, promotional T-shirts, *masses* of competition entries and letters to Lloyd for the Rrap. For me, there were also the letters to PG's Tips, the cheats column I inherited from Jaz. Between us, we read through and picked the choicest readers' letters and I worked through the best cheats, listings and game maps (some of which were amazing) then got started on testing and typing them up.

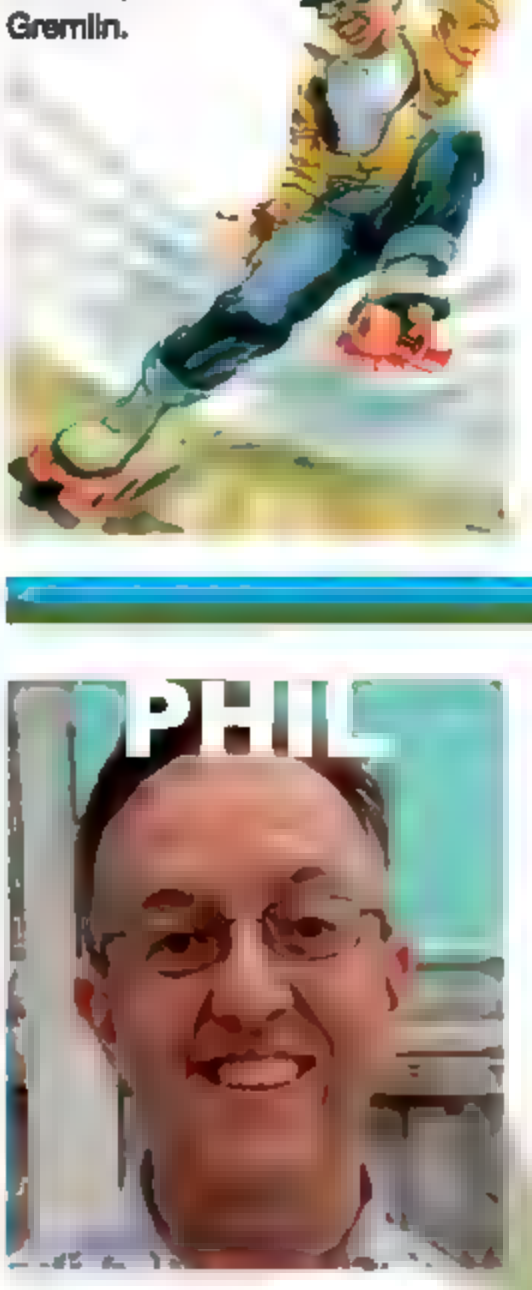
While we were doing this Julian worked out what shape the next issue would take. We got the reviews rolling with whatever had turned up too late for the previous issue then waited for

Working at ZZAP!64 by those who did it daily . . .

PG's TIPS

everything else to come in. At the time there was no shortage of games to cover. Larger publishers sometimes had maybe two or three games coming out per month (not like now where they only ship half a dozen a year, usually around Thanksgiving) and there was no shortage of budget games or budget re-releases. Sometimes a lot of negotiation was required to score the big hits as exclusives, but sometimes amazing stuff like *Great Giana Sisters* or *Katakis* would turn up out of the blue. Ugh – *Katakis*, that was a hairy couple of days!

We had two C64s and a barely-used C128 on the reviewing table, and Gordon and I spent a lot of time hunched over Konix Speedking joysticks playing crappy games and laughing at them (thanks to CRL), and playing amazing games and getting all excited about them. As top dog, Jaz usually got the pick of the games to review, but occasionally he'd let us at the higher-profile titles. There was always a lot of discussion about scoring games because the integrity of ZZAP!'s ratings were its crown jewels, so we had to get it right. The only time I recall us ever getting into difficulties were with Activision's *Predator* (the promised review code turned up late and ended up being unfinished so we had to observe some caveats in how we appraised it) and Gremlin's *Skate Crazy*. That one didn't live up to expectations when it finally arrived either, so, even though we'd arranged to put it on the cover, we could only give it an 86% – not even a Sizzler – and I seem to recall Jaz having to endure a difficult **phone call with Ian Stewart, who ran Gremlin.**



"The real fun came when Cameron Pound rocked up with his camera and started coming up with ideas for humiliating the loser – me . . . "

Cameron Pound

Challenger Steve Lee takes on Houghton and Glancy, but for Paul it's the waste bin, helped in by Jaz and Gordon – the fate of a staff loser

In between the reviewing work we had our regular features. Jaz revived the Scorelord and he wrote it with great relish. It was only ever Gordon or me who represented the mag during that period. Gordon was pretty good at games. I thought I was, but was then proved wrong. The real fun came when Cameron Pound rocked up with his camera and started coming up with ideas for humiliating pictures of the loser – me in a bin or me being thrown out of a window (which my Mum had a fit about when she saw it).

Looking back, hardships like these were as nothing compared to the long hours we used to work, but I suppose at the time, youthful energy, rabid enthusiasm for the subject, a sense of camaraderie and the feeling of privilege at being part of this great magazine were what drove us on into the night.

Great days, they were. ■

Confession time: I have never owned a C64. I had hardly even played on one before joining ZZAP!64 in the summer of 1989. I'd been working on Crash for around a year – my dream job as I was games mad and a long-time reader of the magazine – when I got the call to join ZZAP! when most of the existing team had left suddenly. I was off work at the time, recovering from a broken ankle that I'd sustained after falling off my nephew's skateboard. I recall returning to work on crutches and having to somehow clamber, bottom first, up three flights of stairs at the King Street offices to reach the ZZAP! office on the top floor.

Randy (Paul Rand) was already in the office and said hello, then asked me a question about three or four times. His Geordie accent was so strong, I could hardly understand a word of it! I think he must have been asking whether I liked Erasure since he started playing their album. I also remember him chatting a lot about his family and somehow managing to get countless photos of them into his playing tips section.

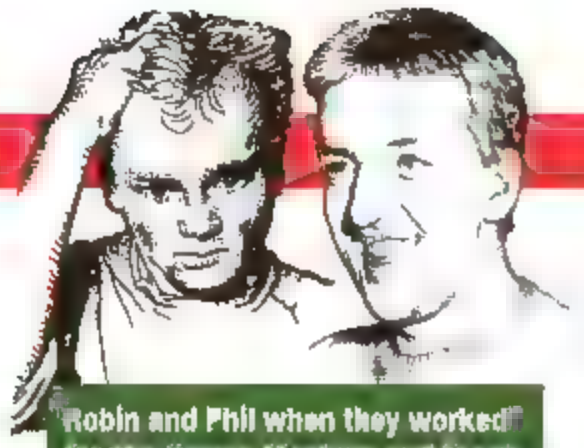
Randy left for EMAP a little while later, so then it was just me, Stuart Wynne (who I'd worked with on CRASH) and Robin Hogg.

Photo: Roger Kean

"The move out of the town centre to the riverside Case Mill in the summer of 1990 wasn't exactly welcomed. "

Over the next few months, we became a really close-knit team; at King Street, we had a separate office to ourselves, so maybe that contributed to the camaraderie. I loved working with those guys and we became firm friends.

Before the advent of desktop



Robin and Phil when they worked for The Games Machine and Crash respectively, depicted as ZZAP! Challengers, #44 December 1988.

PIG IN A POKE!

ROBIN

Halcyon days they were, working for the kings of games publications in sleepy Ludlow, the kings in King Street. Has it really been over 30 years? Did I really work on the legendary ZZAP!64? Was it fun? Yes, yes, yes. So long ago, so many fantastic memories but frustratingly so many more I've forgotten.

Memories I do have are always first and foremost of the great Newsfield team/family, but particularly of working with Stu and Phil, the 'rivalry' with Crash (even though I worked with the 'enemy' on occasion), the lunchtime game playing sessions, the excitement of new games loading, the arguments we had over the merits (or not) of those new games, the privilege of attending software launches at the major names such as Ocean, US Gold, Domark, and of course the mad rush to get reviews complete on deadline day – in those situations you quickly learnt to touch type. So many fond fond memories.

I was the main *ZZAP!* person who went out to interview programmers of upcoming games. In those days the programmer was often solely responsible for virtually every aspect of a game (far removed from the 100s responsible nowadays for headline games and arcade/movie conversions). I made good friends with them and got an insight into the creative passion they put into the games, be it visiting Chris Butler, Sensible Software, the Ocean crew or Apex Computer Productions, in particular John and Steve at Apex who helped us out immensely with their *Creatures* diary.

> **"One day I will return to Ludlow . . . It will be a surreal moment trying to recall 30 years ago, climbing those stairs and seeing soon-to-be friends creating the future."**

The future arrived with the Amiga. There were some stunning games, in particular from Psygnosis, Bullfrog, Cinemaware and the Bitmap Brothers, but there was dross too and on a number of occasions the old C64 bettered the Amiga for use of machine. Though there was life in the old dog it was getting on a bit and 16-bit was showing the inevitable way forward; Amiga games like *Speedball 2* and *Kick Off 2* became firm lunchtime ZZAP! favourites (I never did beat Phil at *Kick Off 2*). I think we did a great job of bridging the gap between the machines, introducing the Amiga as a natural progression to the readership. The best reviews to my mind were when we had both the C64 and Amiga version of a game, which made for interesting comparisons; the Amiga version not necessarily the better. For me *Turrican II* is the best example – a great game on Amiga, but a truly excellent one on the C64.

Reviewing games for this annual, I began to get those long lost feelings of the fun I had of putting words into print, my personal views and my opinions of games, games which stirred all sorts of emotions and passions. It was always great to see those words in a magazine afterwards, but ultimately the best reward for me was being given the opportunity to work for Newsfield (and get paid for it, *wow!*). I did the tips section – Pig in a Poke! – in my time, which was good fun too, collating maps, tips and pokes (thank you Wazza) and bringing it together in my own section. Not sure all the tips worked, but the maps were great fun to make (and eat in the case of the *E-Motion* maps made of Opal Fruits (I would say ask your dad, but what would be the point? – it's probably Dad reading this!).

Although I've moved out of the industry I was delighted to be asked to work on the ZZAP!64 Annual. The resurgence of the homebrew industry amazed me, but also by the quality of games such as *Sam's Journey* and *Hessian*, stunning new titles on a 36-year-old computer. If that doesn't show passion then I don't know what would.

One day I will return to Ludlow to look at the blue plaque in King Street. It will be a surreal moment trying to recall 30 years ago, climbing those stairs to the offices and seeing soon-to-be friends creating the future. Passers-by won't know anything of what happened there, but pilgrims like myself will know of its importance to the fledgling UK games industry and I'm very proud to have been (and be) part of it. ■

Photo: Roger Kean

Stuart 'Stu' Wynne, photographed at 'Stalag ZZAP!' in 1990.

Photo: Matthew Uffindell

SIZZLER

HUNTER'S MOON

Thalamus Digital Publishing — 2018

Black holes have much to answer for, but they do make great plot devices. Take our hero, minding his own business while testing his latest ship *Hunter*, when BAM! Hits a black hole and is transported to an unknown region of space where giant crystal structures are built by autonomous workers. *Hunter*'s on-board computer suggests information pertinent to escaping lies within these constructions, so off you explore ...

Completing each level requires collecting all the starcells present, one of which flashes for eight seconds at the beginning; obtaining this gives you a loop-space co-ordinate. Each system can be completed in one of two ways: defeat every single level present," or acquire four loop-space co-ordinates. You then progress to a sub-game where defeating all the workers grants an extra life and perma-shield.

No sweat, huh? Think again, those workers aren't going to take to you destroying their hard work lightly, and start to fight back with spore-spitting cells. Some cells are also indestructible. Spores may home in, workers may randomly reverse direction, and the whole level may suddenly plunge into darkness. Some starcells are not easy to reach as first thought, lurking within puzzles and hard to reach areas, or may even be false, invisible or jump to different locations.

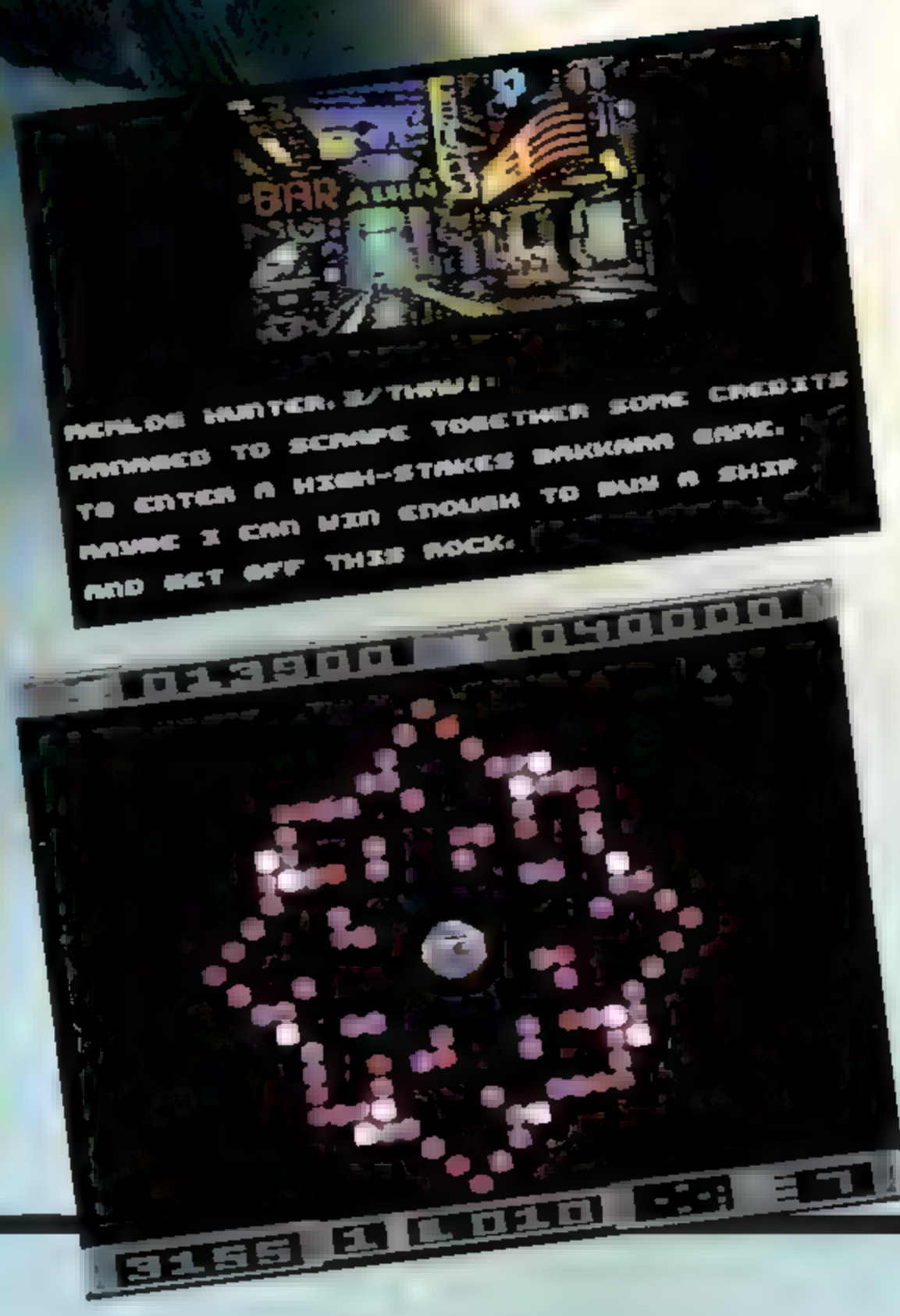
All is not lost. The player has a choice of three different engine (control) types to best suit their style, and it pays to experiment with all of them. For difficult levels, there is also a limited supply of perma-shields available that protect the Hunter from incoming spores.

Getting home isn't going to be easy.

A ZZAP!64 Sizzler (92%) in the February 1988 issue, Hunter's Moon enjoyed rave reviews from many in the games business. Now, in addition to the remastered release, players also have the option of the original [illegible]

trainers for a helping hand. A hints page gives the lowdown on each cell type. The remastered version also supports multiple languages, PAL and NTSC, and the ability to save your settings and game progress. Finally, the level editor means that if you never get bored of the existing levels, you can create your own nasty, devious pieces of work to play through again and again.

Hunter's Moon was always one of the more interesting, unusual and challenging shoot 'em ups and now that it's back to challenge me even further, I couldn't be happier. It's a different proposition to any other shmup, as you're not dealing with relentless waves of attacking ships. This is more of a puzzle game-cum-shooter with collect 'em up elements. Picking your way through the star systems requires much thought, with some levels taking a good deal of working out. Special mention has to go to the game's presentation. I can't fault it. A ludicrous amount of effort has been put into making this the most attractive package you could imagine. Thalamus Digital has spared not a single byte in cramming in the most incredible array of options and features you'll find in any C64 game. There's even a comprehensive level editor so if and when you complete the game, you can build your own sequel! Hunter's Moon Remastered *is a stunning update of one of the most original games in the C64's catalogue. You owe it to yourself to check it out.*



ZZAP! TEST

REMASTERED

Hunter's Moon Remastered *is absolutely stunning in its presentation . . . and the loading screen is (and I cannot state this enough)* ***THE BEST LOADING SCREEN I HAVE EVER SEEN!*** *But it's not quite enough I do love my shmups (© ZZAP!64 – and don't let anyone tell you otherwise) but I like them to be fast paced, varied graphically and challenging. This delivers on the last point*

but the idea of a cerebral shooter goes against the grain for me and I didn't get the adrenaline rush to keep me hooked. Learning the rules of each level is novel at first and working out how to get the crystals is a very tough puzzle: at times involving probing defences, avoiding aliens and trap areas and all the while attempting to dodge (plenty of) bullets But ultimately the subsequent levels are just too similar in gameplay. I ended up getting something of a sinking feeling as I progressed knowing the gameplay wasn't going to change much. I so wanted HMR *to be brilliant. It is polished within an inch of its life as is to be expected from Thalamus, and fellow title* Amalyte *is the pinnacle of shmups outside of the arcades so it is in good company. But* HMR *isn't quite brilliant because of the repetitive gameplay at its heart.*

The original Hunter's Moon *never quite got the attention it deserved. The intelligence, cunning and, at times, swearing-inducing chicanery are all in the level-design. None more so than in the 50-plus new levels that introduce way more features, the nastiest being the system blackout where you're thus inclined to act like MC Hammer until the lights return! You never quite know what's coming next. Add the level-designer, built-in trainer, foreign languages, improved off-duty mode, new music, intro sequence . . there's an awful lot more for your money. Or you could just play the 1987 version. The bottom line is, if you didn't take to the original then you may be persuaded to try again, but if you loved it like me, then this is everything you could wish for and more*

PRESENTATION 98%

GRAPHICS 92%

SOUND 90%

HOOKABILITY 92%

LASTABILITY 95%

OVERALL 93%

Thirty years on a great game

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS ARCADE

Nostalgia, from the original version — 2015

2019

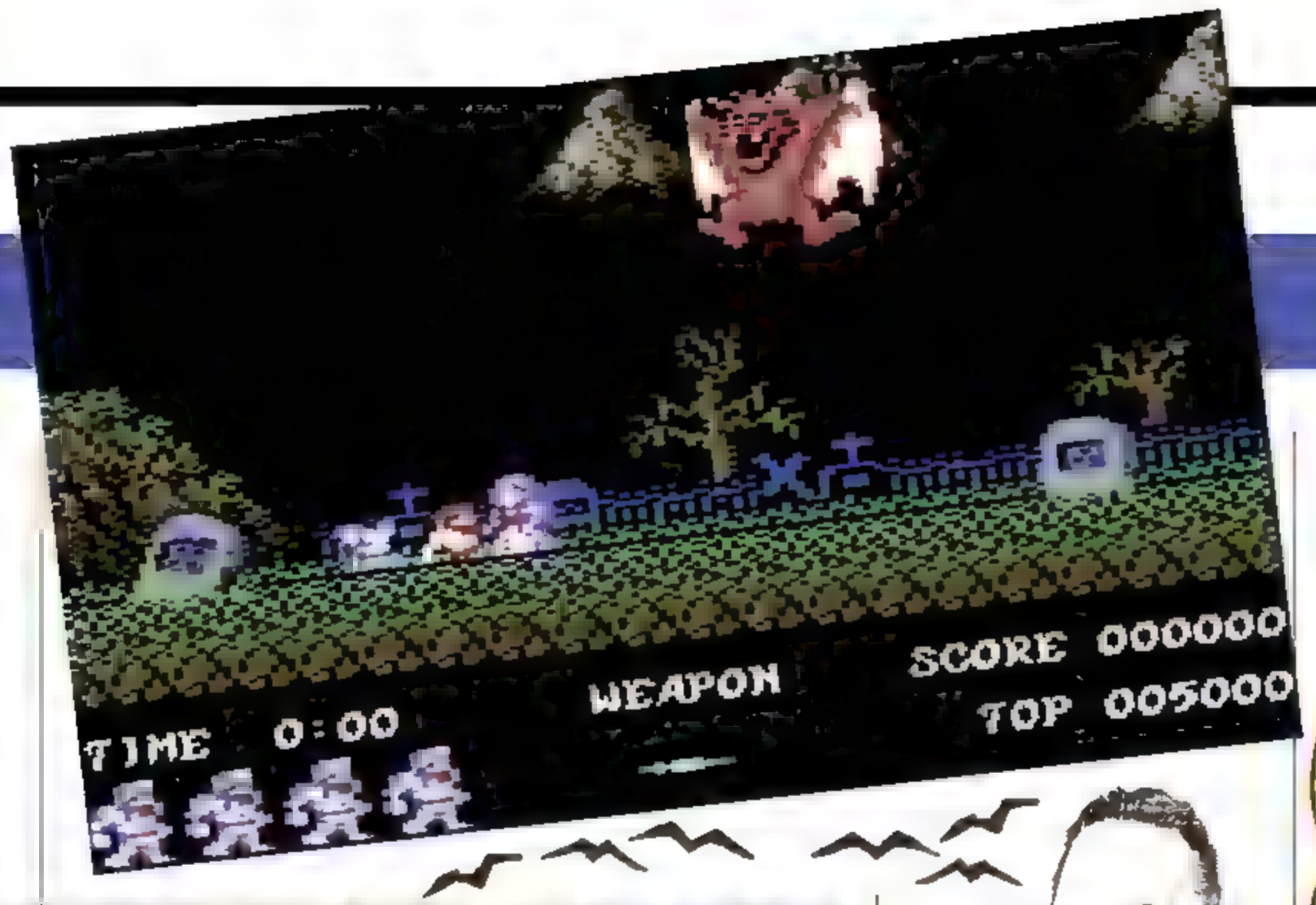
It's just possible that there might be a reader who never played the 1986 original – in the arcade or on a C64 [*Is that really possible? —Ed*]. But in case you – yes, you over there in the corner – didn't: a demon has kidnapped Sir Arthur's girl, and as the valiant knight you're off on a quest to rescue her in the face of a horde of the demon's evil creatures out to prevent you winning the distressed damsel. All this against a per-level time limit and increasingly bigger boss demons guarding the exits from each level.

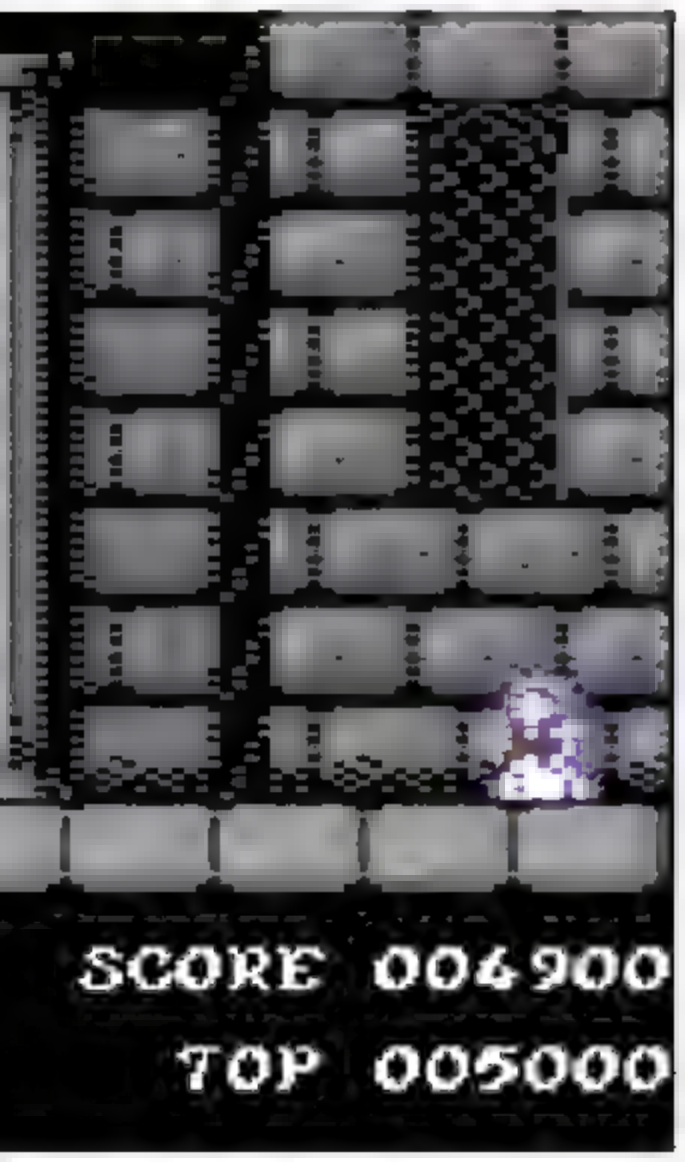
Not satisfied with giving *Commando* the C64 conversion it deserved (*see the review on page 6*), Nostalgia set out to improve *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, another Capcom arcade conversion by Elite, and indeed by the same programmer. In the September 1986 issue of ZZAP! it received a Gold Medal with an overall 97% rating for being 'an outstanding arcade conversion' (*see also Jaz Rignall's updated feelings on the rating, page 60*)

Anyone who ever played *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, on any format, will remember it for a variety of reasons – the armour, the weapon upgrades that weren't upgrades, the various foes to

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE! New title screen by Steve Day

I was delighted when the team asked me to review the remake of Chris Butler's masterpiece. Back in the day, I remember the elation I felt at beating the ZZAP!64 published high score. I wrote a letter – witnessed by my Mum – explaining the technique I'd used to get the score. ZZAP! never published my score: three decades later and I still bear a grudge. With this, I put things right and finally ***see my name in ZZAP! next to Ghosts 'n Goblins.*** *I fire up the C64, load the original* Ghosts 'n Goblins, *and lose a few hours playing, still enjoying the graphics, audio playability and the fact I've got pokes to help . . . Could a remake improve on this? The original is genuinely good: how could this be improved? Well for one by giving us astonishing graphics, lots more and improved music, more levels – now faithful to the Capcom arcade original. Even though I disagree with my colleagues' Hookability rating when reviewed contemporaneously (my kids took persuasion to persist, but enjoyed it),* Ghosts 'n Goblins Arcade *is every bit as playable as the arcade original. The subtle improvements visible in the loading screen are to be seen throughout. This is a really astonishing piece of work, a love letter to both the C64 and Capcom's original. Go out, get this now, and go back 30 years: it's better than the original, and the ZZAP! crew gave it a Gold Medal back in #17.*

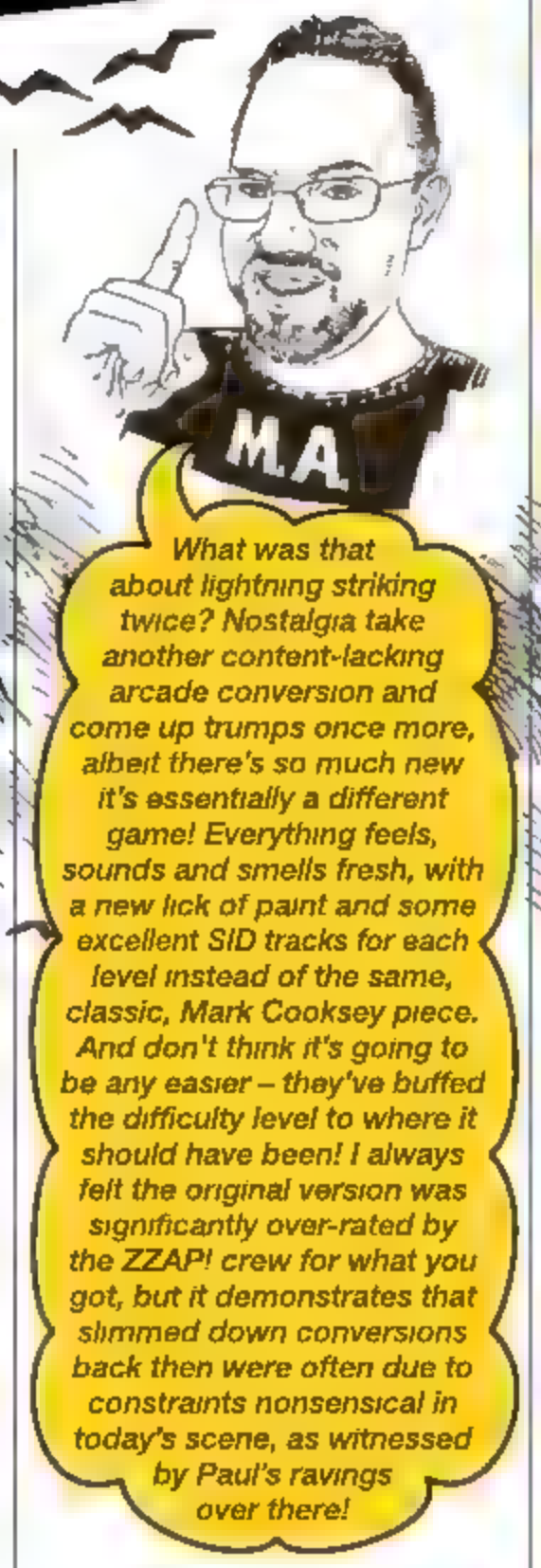




vanquish, those damn red devils – but everyone remembers how 'rock freakin' hard' it was, and the current difficulty level has been enhanced even further. The loading screen looks familiar, but then again . . . different – more detail, more finesse . . . you might wonder whether this is really a C64 producing this.

The original's graphics – a notable point in its favour – are a leap ahead: more detailed backgrounds, and better drawn and animated sprites. In turn they are echoed in the music, which has more variance and depth, and changes throughout the levels – all six of them. Yes, the game now matches the arcade version instead of the 1980s conversion with only four, and the missing progress screen has been included along with the intro, and a 'happy ending' for Arthur. Due to the size of levels there are now points where scrolling is replaced with a cut, but that illustrates how much the game is pushing the limits.

The built in trainer facility means you can reach the later levels without the substantial financial investment demanded in the arcade. Nostalgia have gone to town to fix other details as well – such as the ability to shoot backwards when in mid-air, which wasn't available in the Elite version.



PRESENTATION 91%

GRAPHICS 96%

SOUND 91%

HOOKABILITY 94%

LASTABILITY 94%

OVERALL 96%

TEST

TIGER CLAW

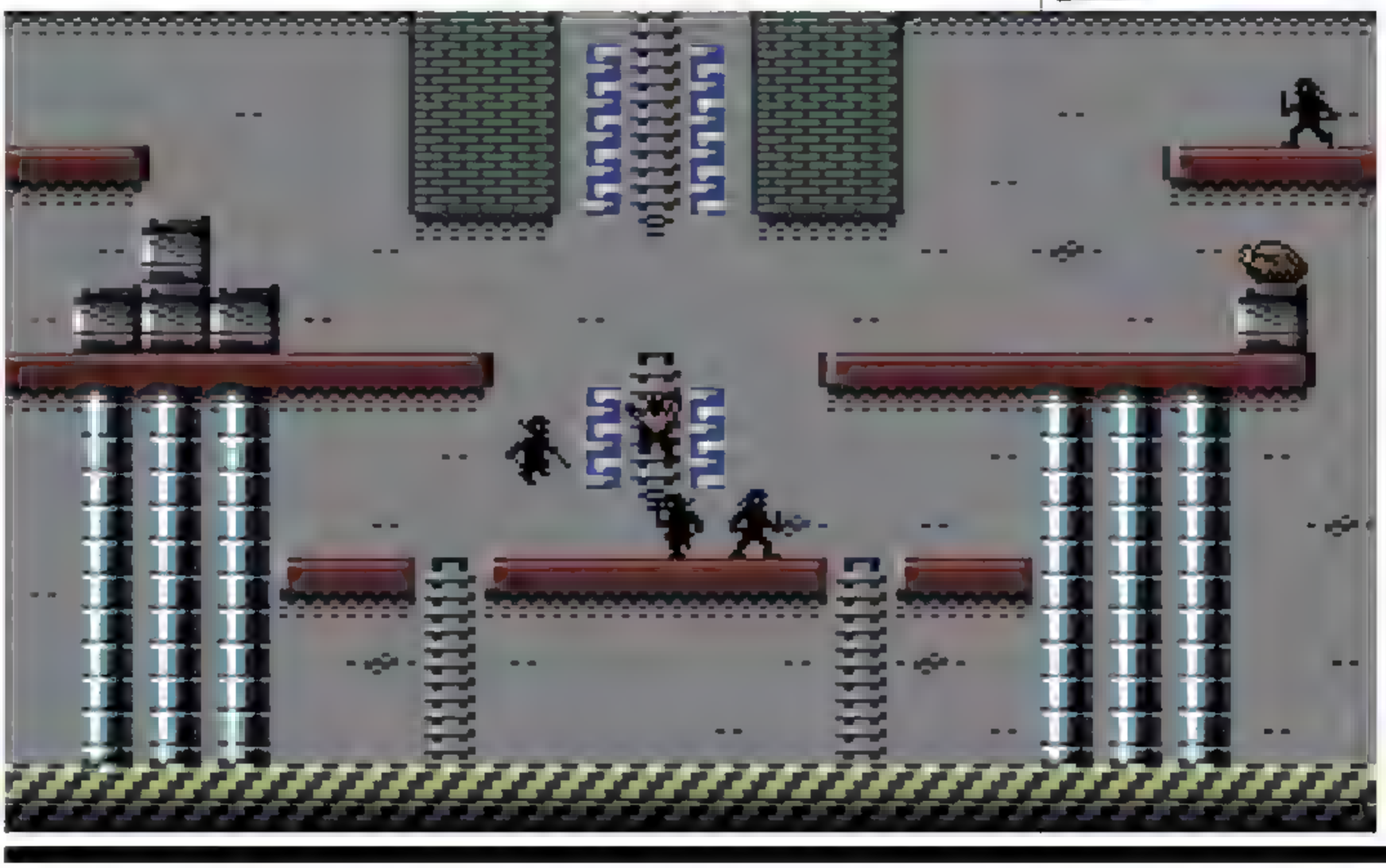
RGCD – 2015

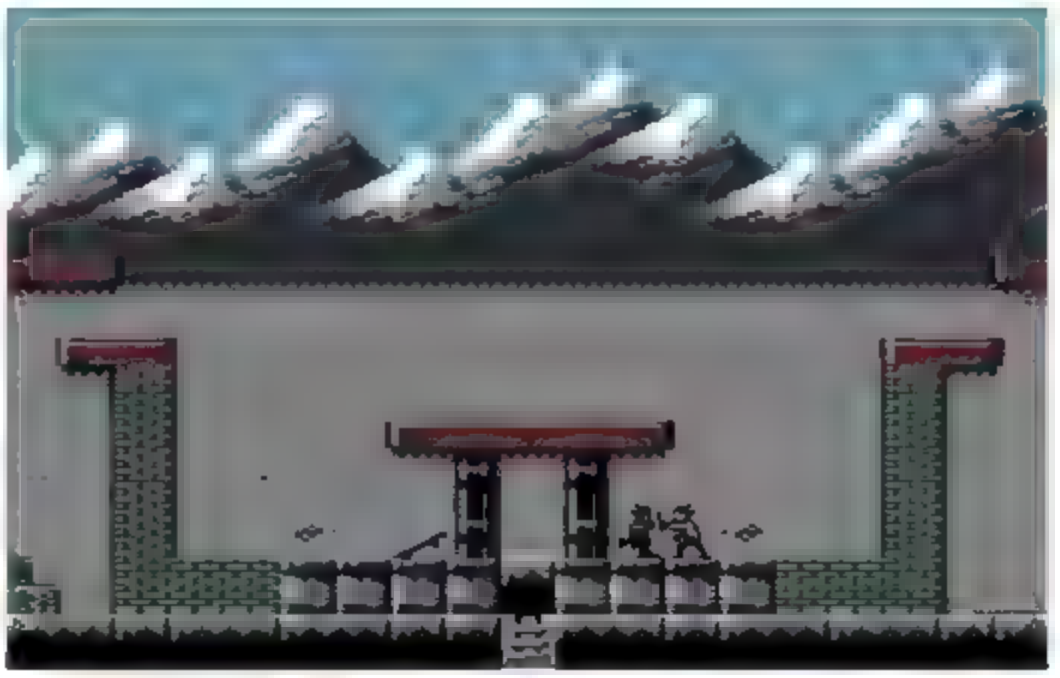
Being a great martial artist must be cool. You get to have all these fantastic fighting skills, you're almost able to defy gravity with your jumping abilities . . . and you get to pick an awesome name. Something like Tiger Claw, for instance. Who'd dare to mess with someone called Tiger Claw?

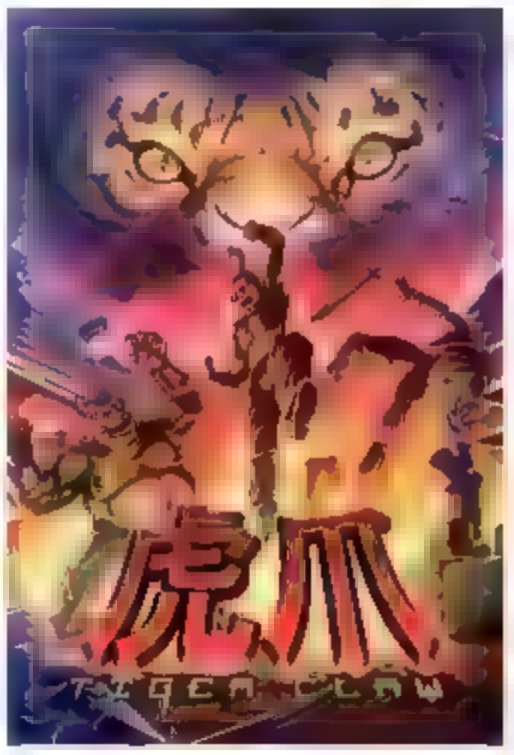
Except for the three Lords of Evil. Not only do they have equally fearsome names, they've also stolen four sacred magic scrolls. It's up to you to get them back from Fire Fist, Thunder Chain and Angry Tongue (I said 'fearsome') before they use the knowledge contained within and fulfil their true dastardly potential.

Fortunately, Tiger Claw has some tricks up his natty purple sleeves. Master Lee, with some prescience and in his infinite wisdom, transferred some of the magic power from the scrolls into the four masks of endurance before the scrolls were taken. Tiger Claw must find these masks and use them in order to become powerful enough to defeat the three martial arts miscreants and regain those scrolls. Should you succeed in your task and become bored, a 'versus' mode for two to four players should keep you further entertained.

Tiger Claw is unashamedly a Bruce Lee clone, and one that I dived into immediately. There are more screens, a greater openness, power ups and a larger enemy variety, including dogs, compared to that aforementioned classic. A training mode and a substantial roster of soundtracks add to the overall presentation. Originally submitted for RGCD's 16K competition, there were noticeable flaws present however that kept it from scoring higher. This subsequent enhanced release has tightened up some of those, such as the inertia, but a few remain, most notably an issue with foot placement before falling off a platform, and the feeling of a lack of weight to movement and fighting. This unavoidably makes the gameplay somewhat frustrating at times, and your health bar rapidly depletes as a result. Tiger Claw is a spiritual successor, but not one that will be regarded similarly as a classic.







THE WILD BUNCH

Psytronik — 2009

Times is hard in the Old West Every day's a struggle for ordinary folks, and with lawless varmints running around all over the place, it's hard enough just to survive 'til sundown. So you don't need to be falsely accused of killing a man. Now you must head into the desert to find the killer and clear your name. Easy.

You know the murderer is one of the notorious Wild Bunch, but the question is . . . which one? It's up to you to travel between five towns, drinking, playing poker and gathering clues before making an accusation that will lead either to justice . . . or death! Don't hang about though. The Government can't be seen letting a murderer like you wander around the prairie, so there's a Pinkerton agent on your trail. Better get on your horse, drink yer milk and follow the trail to righteousness and retribution, fast!

Firebird's budget range provided roughly the same 8-bit game regardless of the computer with some exceptions such as The Wild Bunch, *which was initially a Spectrum exclusive. Pity it didn't stay that way. Playing detective as part of an adventure might sound like fun but it's only an interactive step or two above titles such as Mosiac's* Adnan Mole *'games'. The 'new' graphics really aren't that special and I'd give it a wide berth.*

This crusty old Spectrum game, dusted down and ported to the C64 is 25 years too late. It's not the rootin', tootin' Wild West shootin' extravaganza you might expect, either, but a detective story, involving the pressing of number keys to select options and then read whatever that option represents. You're forced to play a terrible game of poker to try and build up resources to fund the trek between the towns. The in-game graphics are terrible, so there's not even any atmosphere to help save the day. Treat it like the Deadwood smallpox camp; avoid at all costs

PRESENTATION 60%
Lovely – but unskippable – intro and option to watch the end sequence

GRAPHICS 25%
Mostly text, but the cards and Wanted portraits are awful.

SOUND 68%
Inoffensive tunes lift the mood a little.

HOOKABILITY 46%
It sounds like a fun gig, but . . .

LASTABILITY 32%
Interest soon wanes at the game's basic nature.

OVERALL 37%

An interesting concept, but far too simple to hold long-term appeal.

I'm in two minds about this one. As an attempt to surpass the legendary Bruce Lee, there's much to be commended. The game has more depth than that classic, with a bigger quest, more varied enemies and a range of power-ups to be collected. The graphics are also nicer, as you'd expect, and there's a choice of music, modes and difficulty levels. On the other hand, it just doesn't feel quite as nice to play. There's a real weight to your movements in Bruce Lee *that's missing here, so I felt a little disconnected from it. Also, the objectives are not quite as clear, which might be seen as a positive for those who found* Bruce Lee *too easy, but for me it muddies the water a little too much. By all means try it, though . . . you may find your feelings differ and your enjoyment greater.*

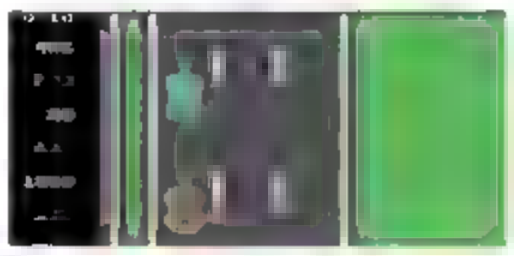
Paying homage to the classic Bruce Lee, Tiger Claw *has the smallest sprites I've ever seen, they probably look up to a Lemming shortly before beating it up. In this fast-paced game, running and leaping from screen to screen, it's easy to get into but hard to get far without getting pummelled. Part of the challenge is to work out how to get to a platform you can see on one screen while navigating from another while taking on the challenge of surviving countless ninjas, dogs and other minute but equally well animated enemies. Could they have been a bit bigger? Probably, partly because I found collision detection a little suspect in places, but* Tiger Claw's *charm lies in their size, the game size and the game's pace. It's not deep but it's got an instant hook and offers fast and furious fun. With a nice front end giving lots of options, including a choice of great soundtracks and skill levels, this is an enjoyable game (in a violent way), which reboots a renowned title nicely.*

OVERALL 71%

SPEEDING ON THE A81

poly.play/TechnischeMachinenfabrik — 2018

Speeding on the A81, makes you the proud owner of eight dream machines. Climb into your choice of Ferrari, Porsche, Mercedes, Jaguar or BMW, then it's foot down on those glorious (German) highways. The road is more traffic-strewn than you might like, so speed with a measure of caution. Although a high-speed crash doesn't spell instant death, a few bumps sends the vehicle to a halt at the side of the road. Travel far enough, though, and a black car is encountered signifying a bonus level. For added authenticity, the game can be played with a steering wheel using the Jocopod, an adapter constructed by the developer specifically for this game. Much cheaper than a Testarossa!



The best way to describe Speeding on the A81 *is as a cross between* Motor Mania *and Sega's* Turbo, *and when you are going at full pelt the reactions needed certainly match those of the latter title. Once past a couple of stages, the challenge ramps up and it becomes all too easy to clip a couple of vehicles and receive the ubiquitous game over message.* Speeding on the A81 *is a hark back to the early days of videogames, but maybe it should have stayed there.*

When I was about eight I owned an LCD racing game which was thrilling entertainment in the late 1970s, but 40 years on Speeding on the A81 *is not as exciting, albeit a very similar game. I don't know if I'm a fair judge as I haven't played the game with a steering wheel but I wonder how that would make much difference. The overhead viewpoint means that realism is impossible, so you're left with something like a slightly updated version of 1982's* Motor Mania. *I appreciate the attempt to bring a different experience to the C64, but the game simply isn't good enough to warrant it.*

PRESENTATION 80%

GRAPHICS 2%

SOUND 2%

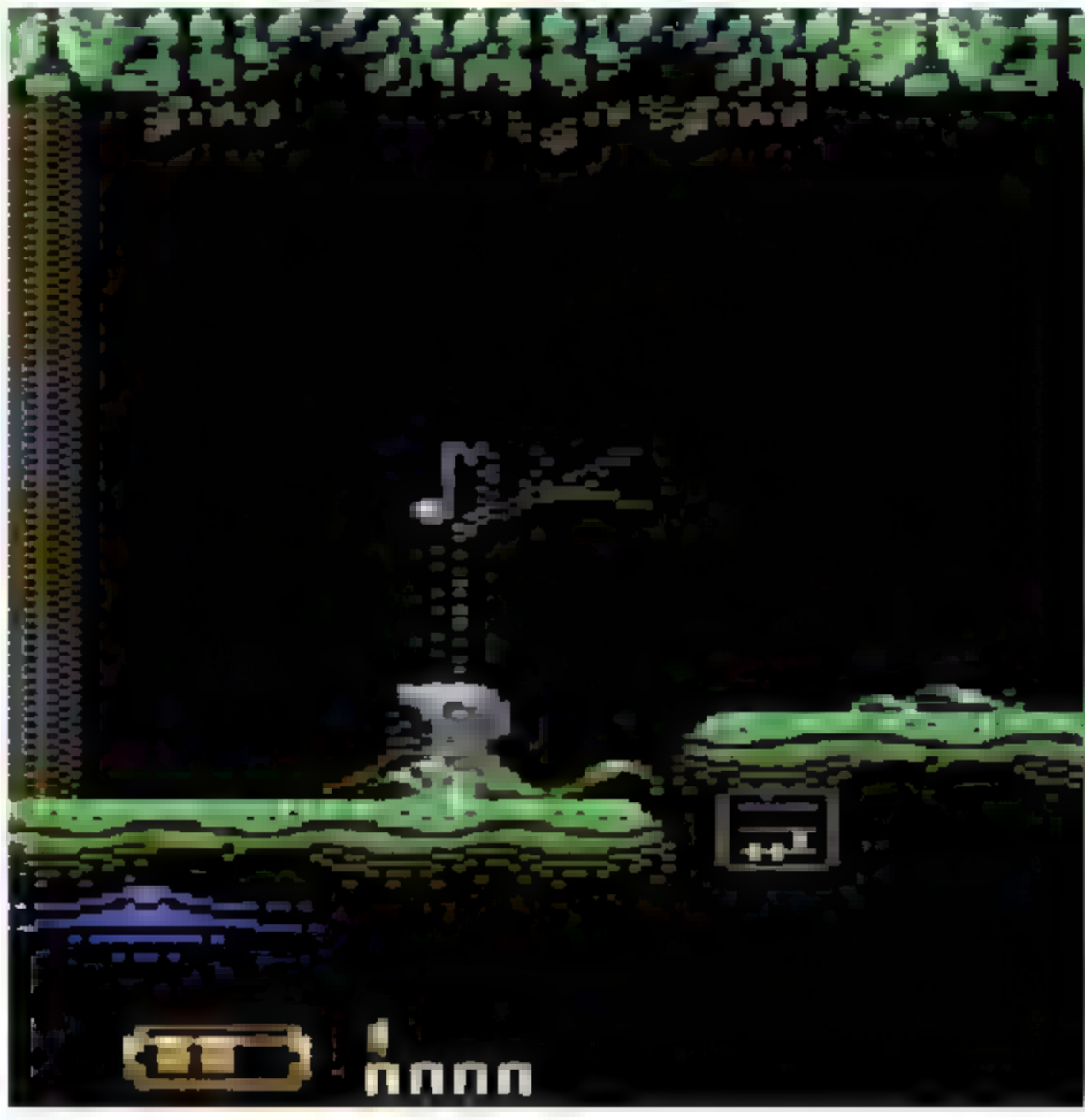
HOOKABILITY 40%

LASTABILITY 8%

OVERALL 34%

PAINS 'N' ACHES

[illegible] — 2018



Mikael Tillander (code and graphics), Håkon Repstad and Hans Axelsson (music and sfx) make up the team who brought out the original *Knight 'n' Grail*, and this sequel continues the story from where the original left off. The extensive playing area promises a massive arcade adventure with locations to explore and puzzles to solve.

There is of course a convoluted backstory, which involves the Archmage who was given the Grail as payment from the Knight for helping him on his quest to free his beloved from a curse. Step forward the wicked Titans who thwarted the Archmage's plans to rule the kingdom. Worse still, the rotten Titans enchanted his consort with the same spell they used to curse the Knight's beloved and the Archmage fled from the hideous monster into which she was transformed.

Now – many years later –the Archmage has heard rumours

of a pendant that could reverse the spell, but in order to embark on this quest he has to take on human form . . . and that's where you enter the picture . . .

At first, I wasn't sure if I was as keen on this entry in the Knight 'n' Graal *series as I am of the original. In fact, after lengthy play, I'm still not. It gets off to a slightly weird start: get past a singing giant wood elf for no apparent reason before defeating a large head in order to continue. After that it's a lot more conventional.* Pains 'n' Aches *is more difficult than the original, but also more interesting in spite of occasionally dodgy collision detection with the landscape or falling to a screen below onto a respawned enemy. Get past such foibles and you find yourself embroiled in another epic and worthwhile quest.* Pains 'n' Aches *is a fine game, which, for me, falls just short of the standard set by its predecessor.*

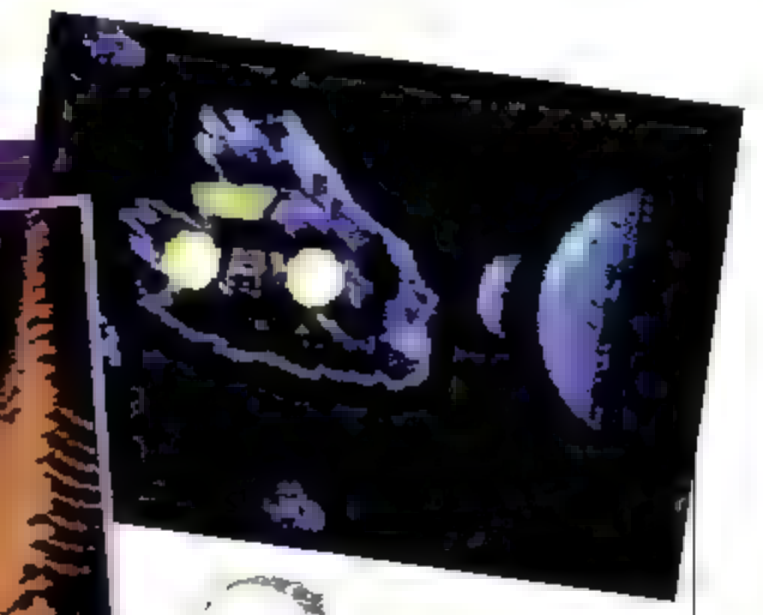
This follow up to Knight 'n' Graal *has the same look and feel, although with improved graphics. Unfortunately it also sticks to the same style of gameplay: sparse rooms and limited encounters, not helped by the mournful soundtrack. Yes,* Pains 'n' Aches *looks better, and it has a large area to explore with a suitable atmosphere, but that doesn't make for an enjoyable experience. The mapping is well done, updating as you go along, with impassable areas and doors opening up after a bit of exploring – and the cryptic clues are even more cryptic if that's possible. There's a nice introduction to set the scene, but it's let down by the dour castle and this feels like a tired game that exhibits no real progression from* K'n'G, *just another rather dull go fetch exercise. A case of tried and trusted but more specifically tired and trusted.*

Having really enjoyed Knight 'n' Graal, *it was with both anticipation and trepidation that I approached this sequel. Would it live up to expectation? The answer there is yes. Exploration is thoroughly rewarded, and each area has its own distinct soundtrack, although it would have been nice to find more behind the destructible areas. Likewise, the map is incredibly well plotted out and constructed, but there are not many new areas where later skills could be used by backtracking. Side quests are a bit of a grind though and some of the clues obtuse. Harder and more frequent bosses than before is a definite plus although the first few are still pushovers. In the end, while being bigger, badder, and cleverer than* Knight 'n' Graal, *it still suffers some of the same flaws, and lacks a smidgen of the charm that enveloped the original.*

OVERALL 81%

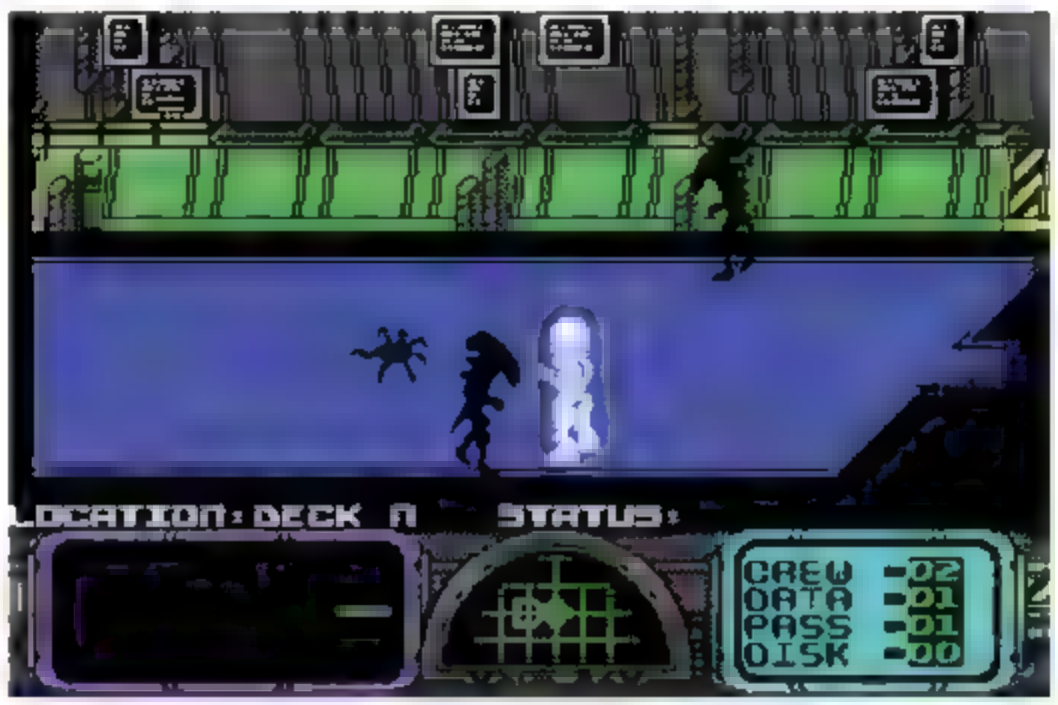
ORGANISM

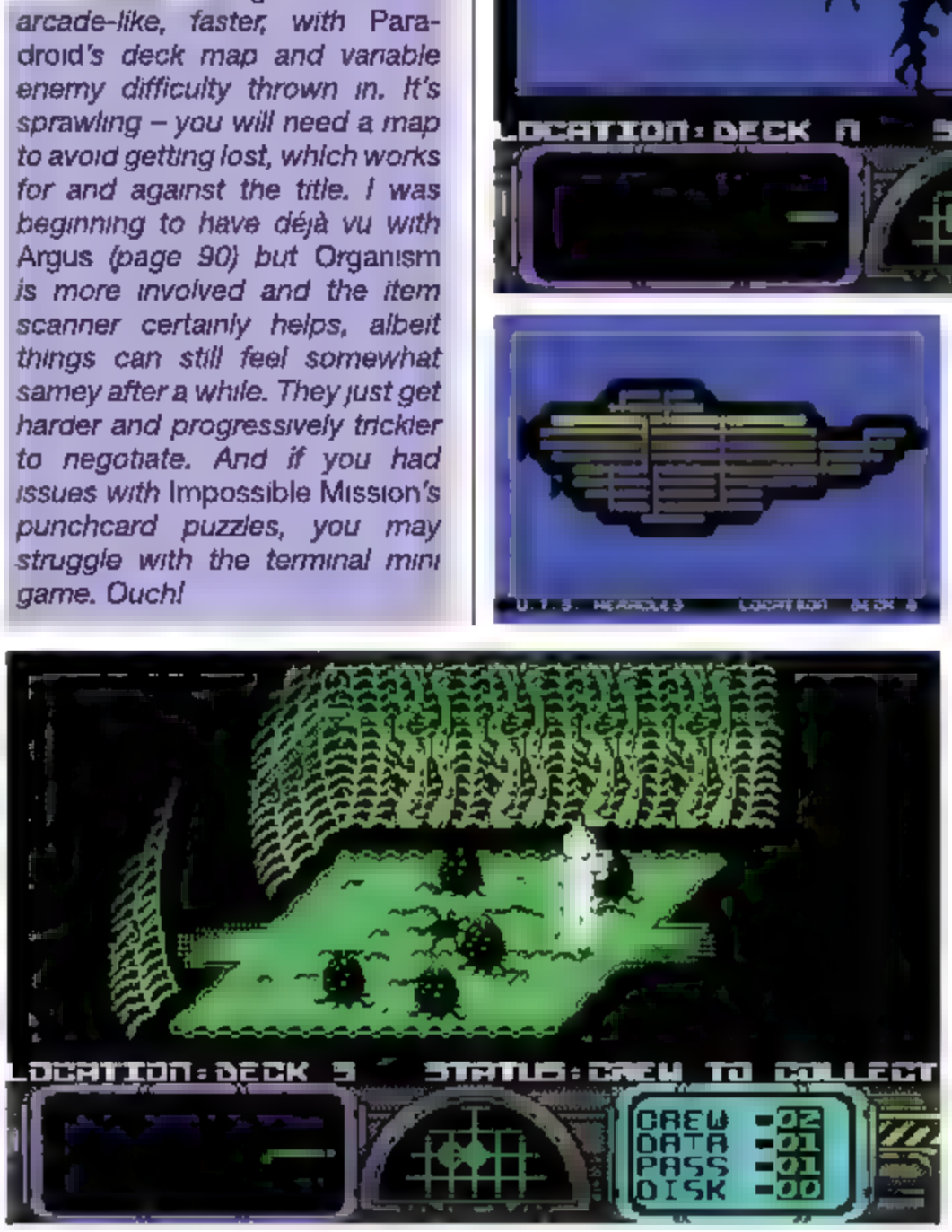
Psytronik — 2018



There's something in the title screen that gives away the inspiration for this immersive science fiction arcade-action adventure from Trevor Storey and Achim Volkers with soundtracks by Saul Cross. *UTS Heracles* (United Transport Shipping vehicle) is travelling on the edge of known space. It's headed for the military station Damocles with a classified cargo, with the crew in hypersleep, but when a breach in the cargo containers fires off danger alerts, the crew are woken up.

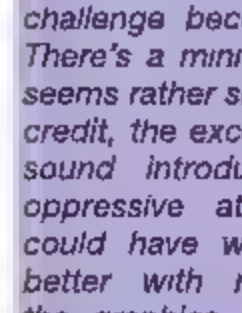
Something's escaped and a spreading horror awaits the crew in the dark, silent corridors of the ship. As a member of the *Heracles* crew it's up to you to investigate the cause of the alarm. As you climb into your UV suit the screams of your fellow crew come echoing from deep down in the ship. What follows is a game of exploration through the decks of the doomed transport. You need to find a means of escape by finding passkeys Data disks and terminals give you access to other areas on the ship Of course there are creatures loose on the prowl to avoid, but also be wary of those crew that may have been infected by something lurking on the ship – something that you must evade or destroy at all costs . .





Electnc Dream's Aliens *game was one of the better film adaptations.* Organism *is more arcade-like, faster, with* Paradroid*'s deck map and variable enemy difficulty thrown in. It's sprawling – you will need a map to avoid getting lost, which works for and against the title. I was beginning to have déjà vu with* Argus *(page 90) but* Organism *is more involved and the item scanner certainly helps, albeit things can still feel somewhat samey after a while. They just get harder and progressively trickier to negotiate. And if you had issues with* Impossible Mission*'s punchcard puzzles, you may struggle with the terminal mini game. Ouch!*

Organism *may be an original game, but it feels like a spin-off from the* Alien *series. The enemies are certainly lifted directly, with face huggers and xenomorphs running riot in the ship. Exploring is daunting, with the critters becoming faster and more aggressive the further down you venture. This would be okay, if your weapon became more effective. There is an upgrade available, but I'll be damned if I can find it. As a result, the game devolves into a treasure hunt with a lot of running away. If there were more things to do or more surprises,* Organism *would have been amazing. Horror fans and mappers should still take a look.*



Rather aptly, Organism *grows on you. It looks pretty awful with a semi transparent hero battling monochrome xenomorphs but see past that and there's a* Project Firestart *game that proves addictive to map as it is very easy to get lost in the (drab) spaceship. Given that the ship is divided into distinct regions, the game would be more atmospheric with different graphics for each area. The face huggers on upper levels are easily despatched, but on lower levels the difficulty ramps up and with no improvements in firepower (that I could find) the challenge becomes offputting There's a mini game, but it all seems rather superfluous. To its credit, the excellent but limited sound introduces a suitably oppressive atmosphere. This could have worked so much better with more variety in the graphics, a tweak of the difficulty level and more depth to the gameplay.*

PRESENTATION 72%
Great intro and a very atmospheric feel, choice of difficulty level

GRAPHICS 54%
Interesting use of perspective gives the game depth, but the sprites suffer as a result

SOUND 73%
Spooky music and an ominous hum ramp up the tension

HOOKABILITY 76%
Gripping from the start, with the alien threat proving quite the adversary

LASTABILITY 65%
A tough task becomes repetitive but it remains intriguing

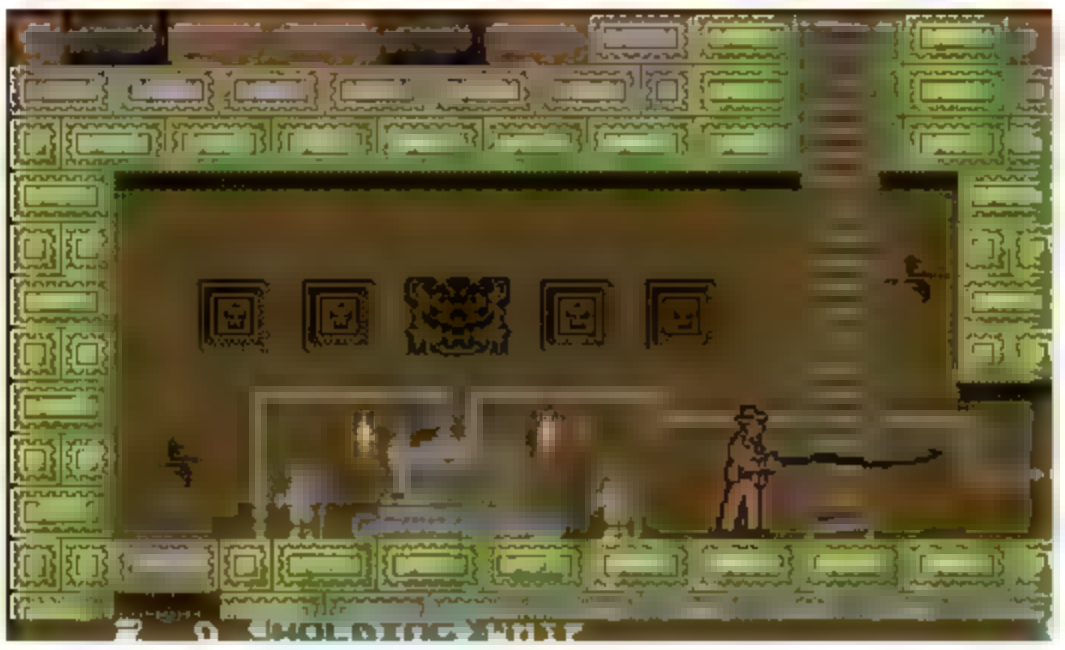
OVERALL 68%

A good Aliens-inspired romp, which with more variety could have been a real gem

DID SOMEONE SAY 'ORGASM'?

THE LEGEND OF ATLANTIS

Psytronik/Collier, Storey & Cross — 2018



Many have attempted to uncover the secrets of the Legend of Atlantis, and now it's the turn of archaeologist-adventurer Rocky Memphis. Having come across a clue to the fabled city's location in a South American tomb, he still needs a lot more to go on and must dig deeper to discover more pieces of the puzzle.

Since he can't get out of the tomb because his ladder is broken, he presses forward to see what lies beyond. Deadly traps and lethal denizens mean the tomb will not give up its secrets easily. However, Rocky is quite a nimble fellow, able to run, jump, climb and shimmy across railings, together with ducking down to search objects, all skills needed to avoid an untimely death and to navigate some of the more taxing areas of the tomb. Thankfully a whip can be found to dispose of some of those problems, while other puzzles are more cerebral. Either way, each distant rumble of noise means something has changed, and hopefully a new area of the tomb unlocked to explore.

He can manipulate only one of the objects in his possession at a time; cycle through the inventory before pressing fire to use it to interact with whatever you are standing in front of

Assisting Rocky are numerous clues left by the Atlantian elders, but needless to say, they are written in their native language. Best find something to translate them – he needs their guidance to find the exit (and possibly some treasure to loot) and the information that pinpoints the location of fabled Atlantis. Aside from that, he's on his own. Alone. With just bats, scorpions and dead people for company. The ultimate insult would be to remain entombed . . .

This threw me at first with its look of being a platformer - a Rick Dangerous *type of game? But when I realised it's a multi-screen puzzle game first and foremost, I began to enjoy its charms. I like the variety of objects to collect, most of which you find a use for fairly quickly, but it builds up in difficulty, not much helped by the cryptic clues on the stone tablets (a nice touch: the stone tablets are unreadable until you get the book). The subtle colour scheme of the detailed backgrounds fits an ancient temple and Rocky is nicely animated. The soundtrack warbles away pleasantly in the background, interspersed with the sound of a passageway somewhere opening up, promising more brain bashing puzzles.* Legend of Atlantis *draws you in and there's a nice sense of accomplishment when you overcome an obscure puzzle. I may be stuck in this temple for a while but I'm sure I'll get there in the end and thoroughly enjoy it in the process.*

There have been many computer adventures inspired by, and even starring Indiana Jones, but many of them fall to live up to that character's reputation. How, then, does The Legend of Atlantis *fare? Well, not badly, but a few niggles keep it from legendary status. The core of the game involves finding items and using them in the correct places, but there's nothing to indicate where an item might be. This results in a very stop-start affair, where you have to 'search' every pot or pile of dirt in case anything is there. Because everything is in the same place every time, it feels like a chore to repeat the same actions game after game. A save game option would have helped considerably. Nonetheless, this is a good effort, which should keep Indy cartographers happy for quite some time*

Aardvarks such as The Legend of Atlantis *live or die by their structure and puzzles. The in-game clues provide enough advice without leaving you completely stumped, and those you do have to figure out yourself are logical and introduce recurring concepts. The intelligent, learning design breeds internal satisfaction when you solve them. The only real niggle is once you obtain substantial items it can be a chore to cycle through them, as collecting a new item immediately puts it into your hand when you still want the whip. I also wanted the adventure to be even longer, which is testament to how much I enjoyed playing it.*

PRESENTATION 71%
Good intro sequence, but lack of a save game option is a blow.

GRAPHICS 76%
Decent backgrounds, great main character, but other sprites are basic.

SOUND 68%
Pleasant intro/title tunes but in-game music becomes repetitive.

HOOKABILITY 74%
The initial urge to explore is tempered by frustration as you get to grips with the way the puzzles work.

LASTABILITY 82%
A large, absorbing quest, but repeatedly replaying opening areas becomes a chore.

OVERALL 82%

A fine adventure that could have benefitted from a few tweaks.

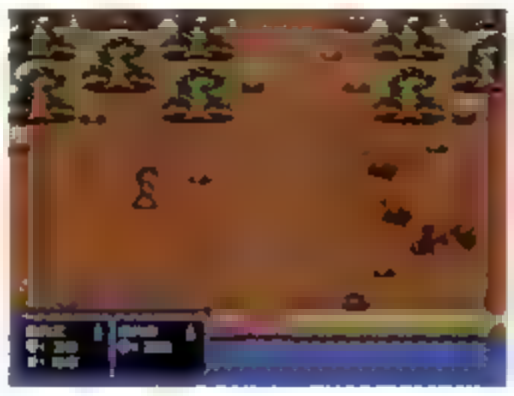
ZZAP! Flash

BEWITCHED

The White Wizard also has something wise – he is a wizard, after all to say on this new RPG (*see page 40*) ***Briley Witch Chronicles*** aims to create a Japanese-style four-way scrolling RPG running on a C64. It's a game based on Sarah Jane Avory's *Briley Witch* novels, so it's very much a story-driven saga, with turn-based combat, hidden items to find, sub-quests, characters to converse with, and lots of magic spells, along with a bit of potion mixing. All put together by Sarah herself

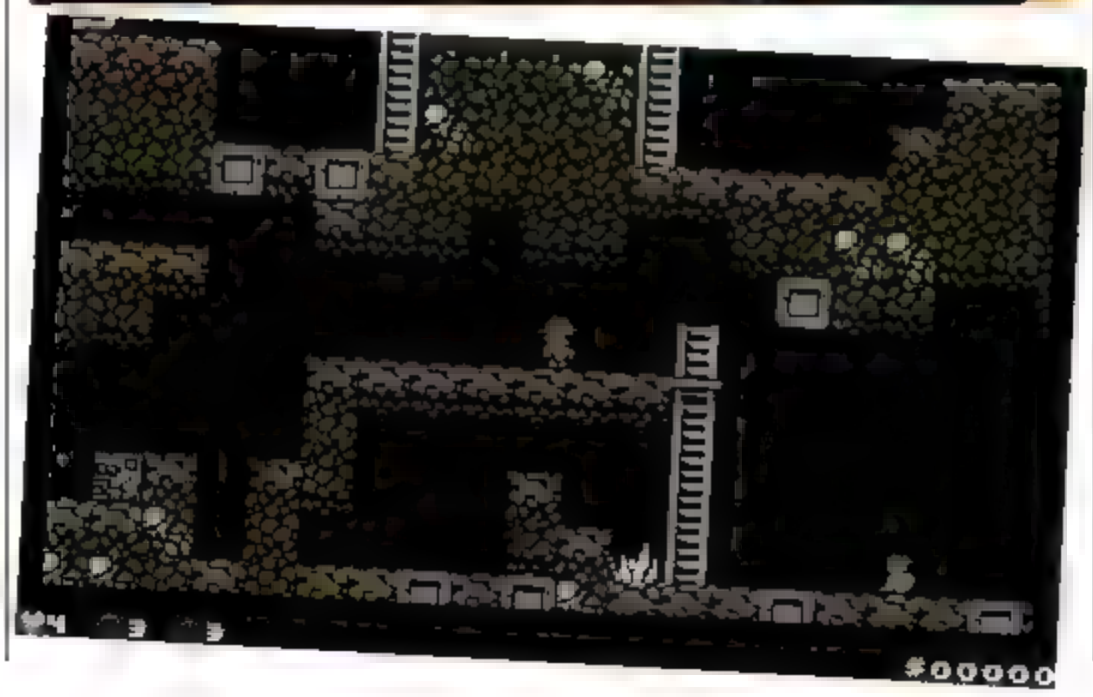
When a mysterious spirit rips 22-year old Briley Forester from her meditations one evening, she finds herself abandoned in a strange, backward world where magic and witches are real. After discovering she herself has become a witch, she faces many challenges and ordeals (as well as a few enemies) while struggling to learn the powers of witchcraft.

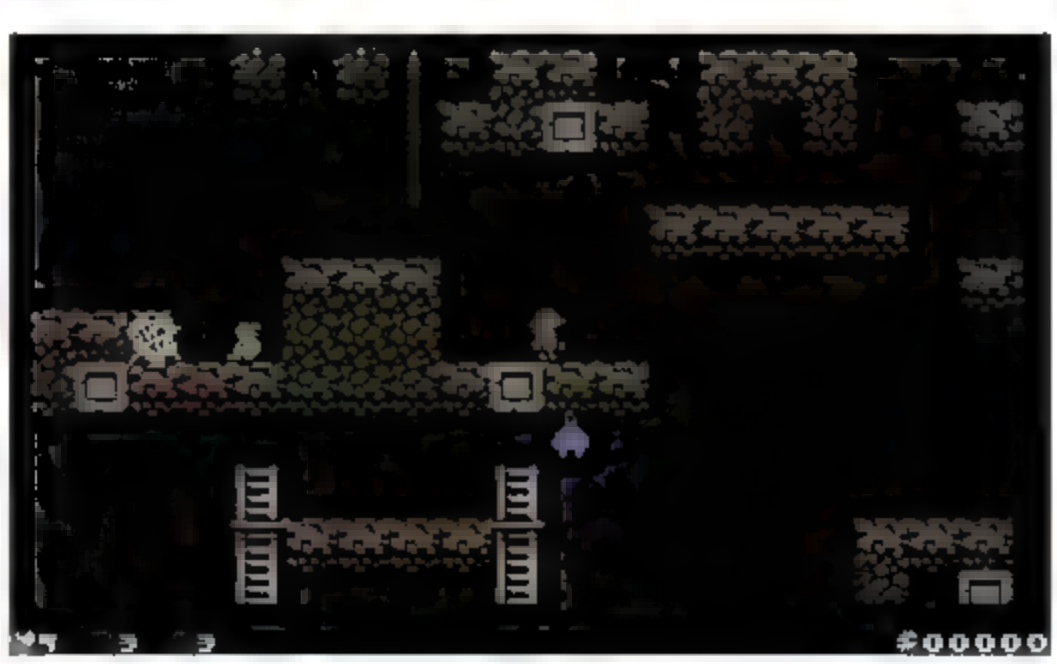
But when a dark evil rises and threatens to consume all witches in its quest for power, Briley must use all her new-found abilities (along with her talking cat and companion Smokey) to defeat it and bring peace to the world.



Spelunky64 is a Commodore 64 port of the well-known indie game, with full approval of Derek Yu himself According to author Paul Koller, who already has a magnificent homebrew track record, having the source code freely available really will help in making the port as close to the original as possible. The original grows on you, and while initially seeming too difficult, after spending time on it you start to 'understand' the game. And from a technical viewpoint *Spelunky64* begs to be ported!

Although there is still a lot of work to do, many crucial parts are already included: full player movement and collision detection, different enemy types; the procedural level generation; and most of the graphics. Due to the game's procedural nature, Paul thinks he can keep it all in a single load. This could be crucial, since you will die often and quickly want to try again!





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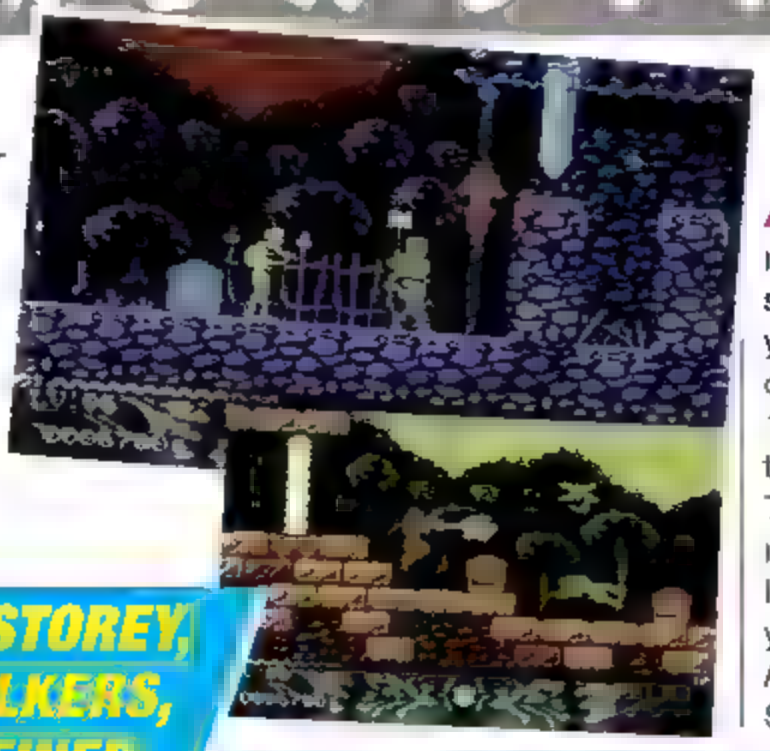
ZZAP! Flash

N·E·W·S f·l·a·s·h···



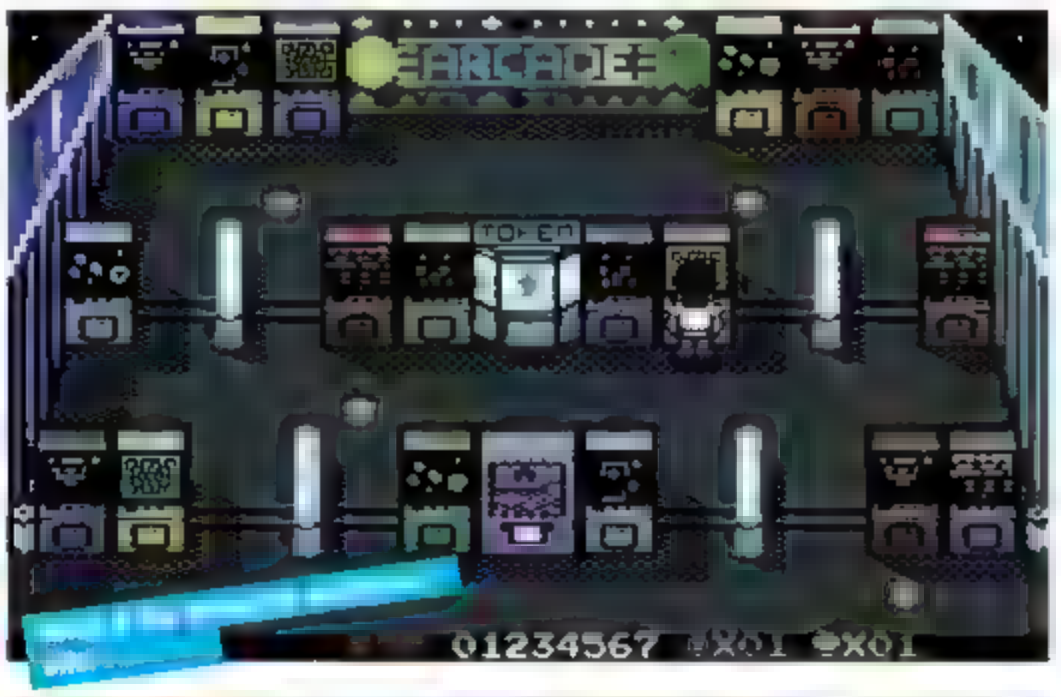
AGE OF HEROES

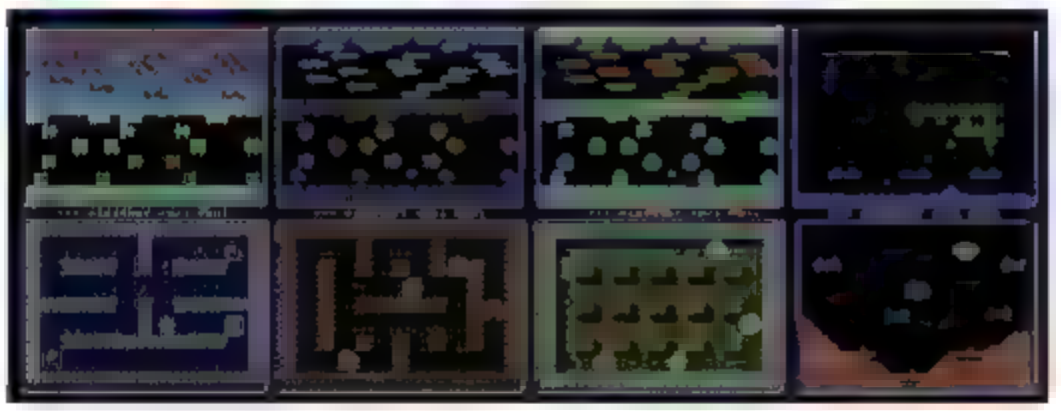
is a horizontal scrolling hack 'n' slash where you can upgrade your character and collect different weapons. There will be 15 stages set across forests, temples, graveyards and deserts. The game will also include an in-game map so you can replay levels over and over to build up your character's level. Code: Achim Volkers; art & design: Storey; music: Cross.

FOUR FROM STOREY, COLLIER, VOLKERS, ROTTENSTEINER AND CROSS

ARCADE DAYS

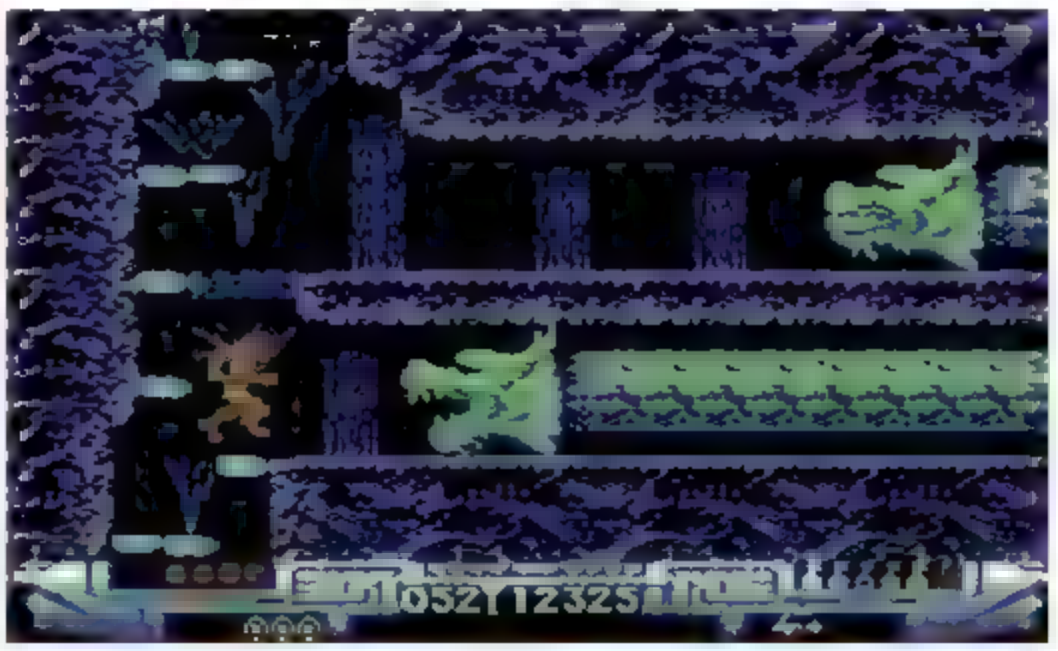
is set – no surprise here! – in an arcade where the aim is to complete every game and get the high score. As you do, collect coins and avoid Kelly and the dangerous Puss Puss Gang. The arcade game genres (see the screens below) include *Frogger*, *Pacman*, *Space Invaders*, *Tanks*, *Centipede* and *Lunar Lander*. Code: Stuart Collier; art & design: Trevor Storey; music: Saul Cross.





SOULLESS 2

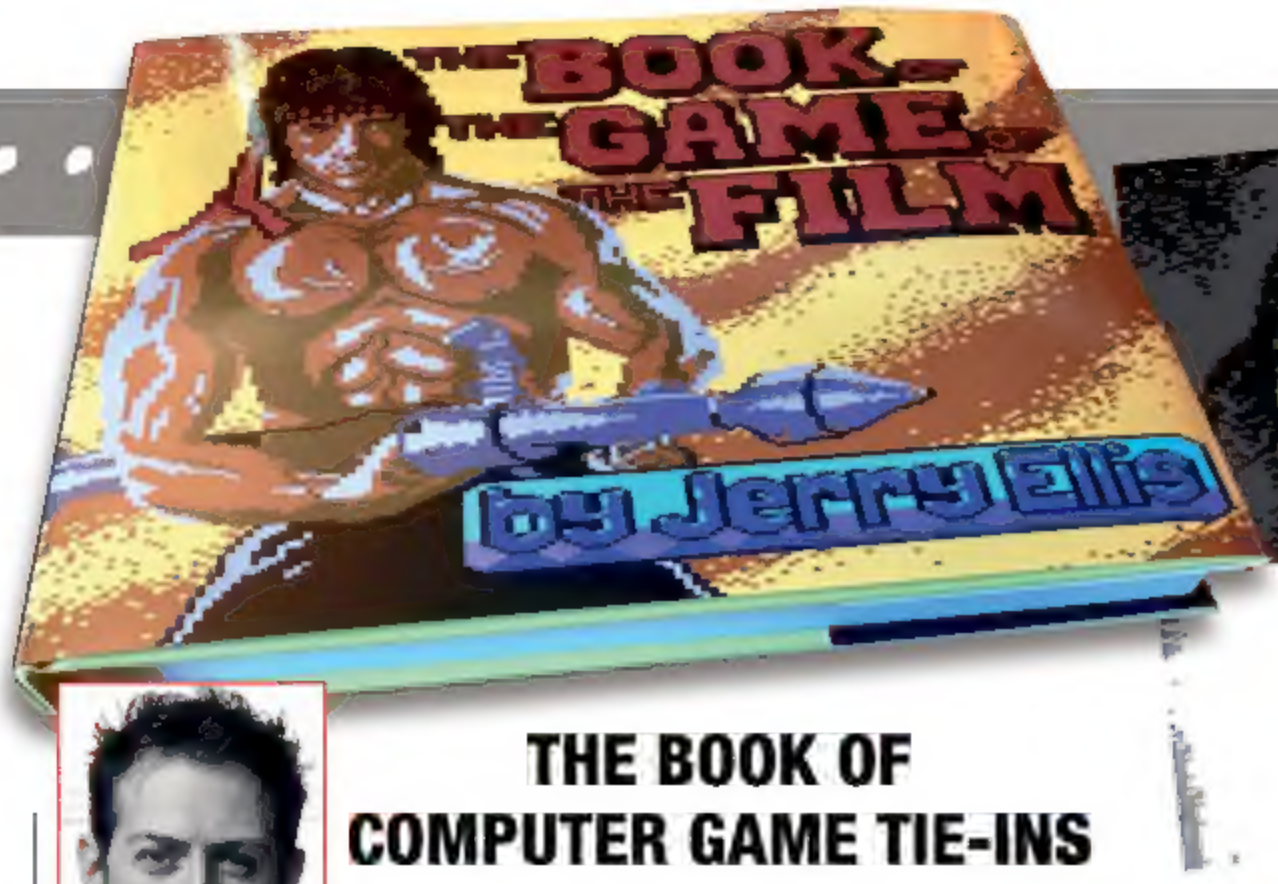
is a platformer set across four locations. Forest, Temple, the Caverns, and Kalen's Lair. The player has the ability to climb into armour and fly around in it, very much in the way you can in *Antiriad*. Another exciting feature is that the game includes some random room placement, so each time you play the game the map will be different. Code: Georg Rottensteiner; art & design: Storey; music: Cross.

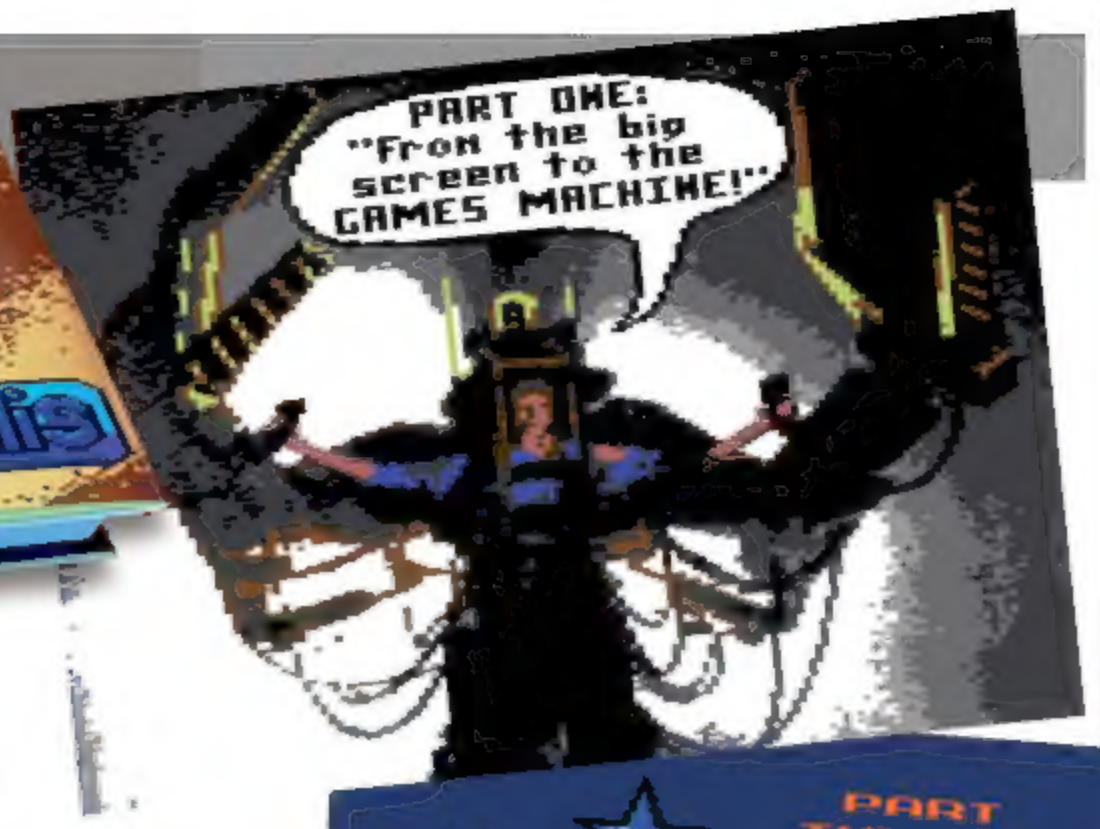


In **BLACKSTAR** fight your way through the upgraded satellite Blackstar and destroy it before it reaches Earth. Upgrade your character and weapons to face around 20 boss fights. Code: Achim Volkers, art & design: Trevor Storey; music: Saul Cross.

MW ULTRA

Metal Warrior Ultra is a new action adventure in development by Covert Bitops, a reinterpretation of the first *Metal Warrior*, which aims to combine shooter, melee fighting and stealth gameplay. You reprise the role of the troubled musician Ian in a near-future world where the sun still doesn't shine much. Expect familiar characters and elements to return, but also a vastly expanded storyline and several surprises! The game features detailed character animations, large multi-directional scrolling screen and will be PAL and NTSC compatible. Ideas and experience gained from the yearly NaNoWriMo writing events will also influence the story department. The game is planned to be finished in 2019, exactly 20 years after the completion of the original.



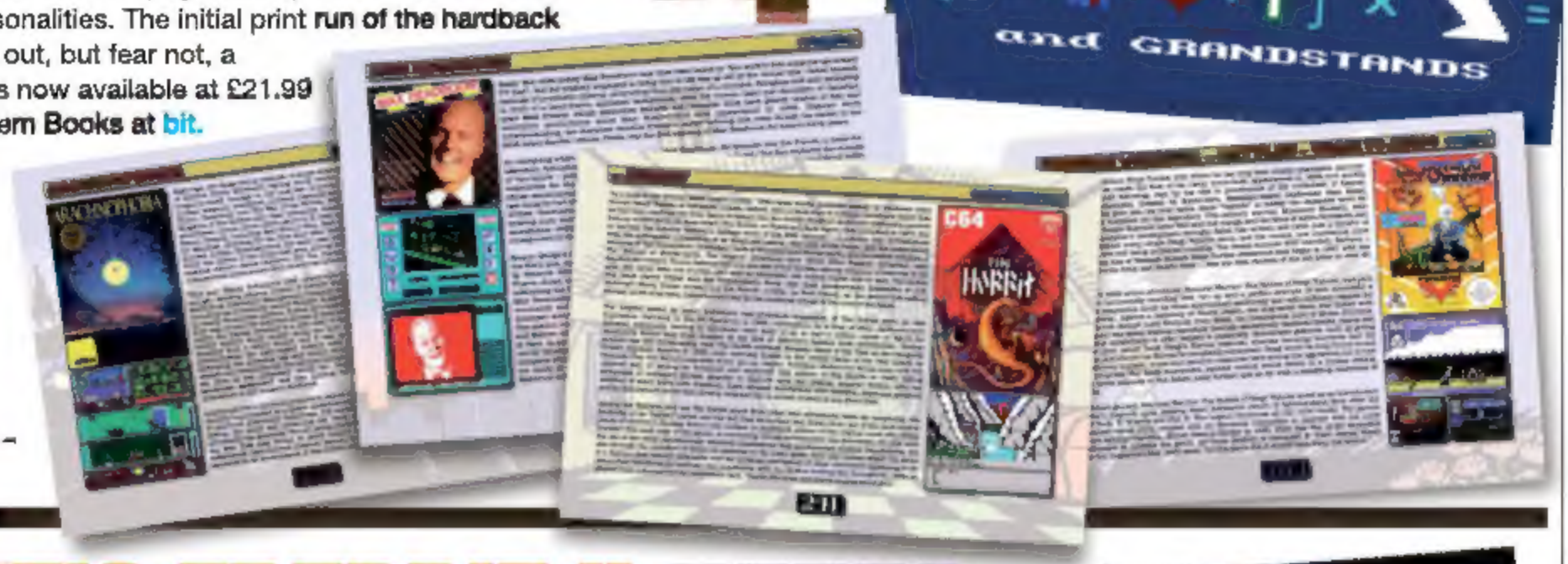


THE BOOK OF COMPUTER GAME TIE-INS

Hundreds of 8-bit computer games were released in the 1980s and early 90s as tie-ins with some of the world's most popular films, TV shows, books, comics, tabletop RPGs, high-street brands and even pop groups.

The Book of the Game of the Film is the latest game-related book from **Jerry Ellis**. The 300 pages are split into four sections from movies to personalities. The initial print **run of the hardback** edition quickly sold out, but fear not, a paperback edition is **now available at £21.99** (plus p&p) from Golem **Books at bit.ly/golembooks.**

Jerry has also announced his next: ***Arcade Imperfect*** is another 300-pager about those conversions from coin-op to 8-bit we – *ahem* – loved.



FRANTIC FREDDIE II

Frantic Freddie by Kris Hatlelid and Greg Larson is fondly remembered by many. More than three decades later there is finally a sequel. The game mechanics remain unchanged, but it has all-new graphics, levels, interludes and music, an animated title screen by John Henderson, high score save, and over a dozen tunes worked to 6581/8580 SID models, and will run on PAL, NTSC and C128-compatible machines. *Frantic Freddie II* is a free download and the original painting (below), on which the title screen is based, will be reproduced in high quality prints, numbered and signed by creator John Henderson. Follow the *Frantic Freddie II* thread online for more details.

UTTER KHAOS!

Galencia Khaos Sphere is the sequel to award winning 2017 game *Galencia*, although there are quite a few differences between the two games. The original *Galencia* was Jason Aldred's love letter to *Galaga*. *Khaos Sphere* is more ambitious on a 512K cart only. There are three distinct genres: a vertical scroller; a *Gyruss*-style game;and an upgraded and refined sequel to *Galencia*. Tie all this together with two versions of every tune to support both SID chip types, a gaggle of world class artists and an engaging story, we think they have something very unique and engaging coming our way soon!

An urban background in the vertical scroller game.

ZZAP!

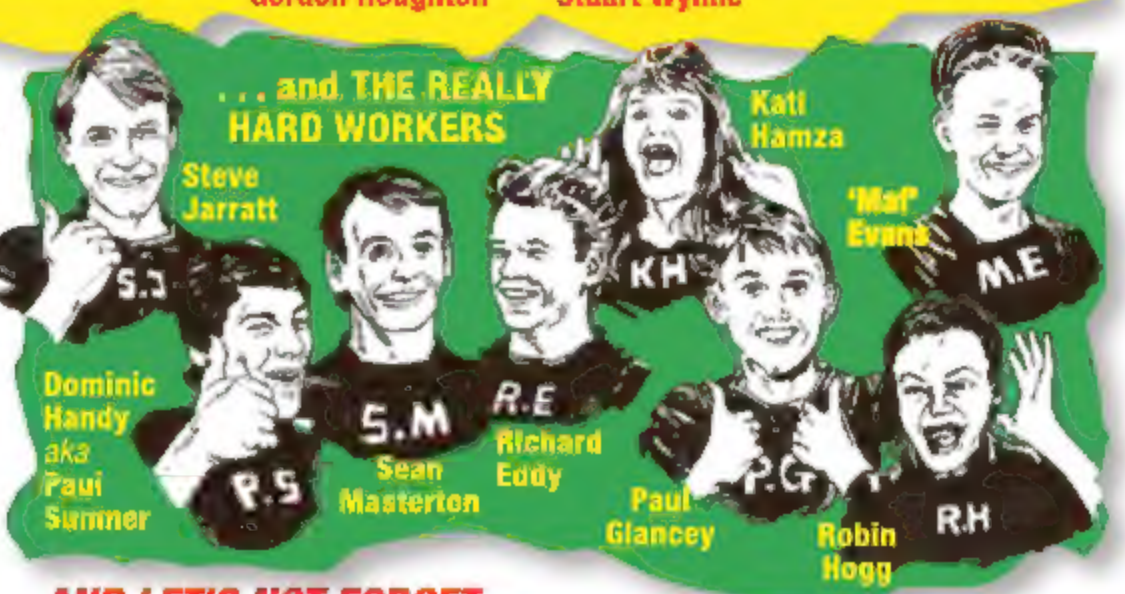
SIGN OFF

Photo: Oliver Frey

When I took over the helm of ZZAP!64 from Chris Anderson with issue 4, I was only the second of a series of editors. It seems only fitting in this first ZZAP! Annual to pay tribute to them, and many of the wonderful, talented and sometimes downright annoying(!) people who worked alongside them to get ZZAP! out every month. (*Clever clogs – that way they won't have to keep cropping up in any further annuals, haha! —Dep. Ed*)

Photos: Roger Kean

Richard Eddy, Stuart Wynne and Phil King at work in Case 'Stalag ZZAP!' Mill, 1990; INSET: after Newsfield, ZZAP! staffer Warren Lapworth worked with Oli and myself until the late Noughties – but there isn't a decent reviewer cartoon of him, so he gets a photo instead!



Oli Frey and Mark Kendrick were not the only in-house artists, there was also Wayne Allen and his creation: **Chuck Vomit** *– gone, but fondly forgotten!*

Photo: Roger Kean

MARKIE

Mark Kendrick tried out a hardman look for publicity stills in 1990 – but frankly he fooled no one, he was far too nice to be mean, horrid or even annoying (and a genius at 3D)!

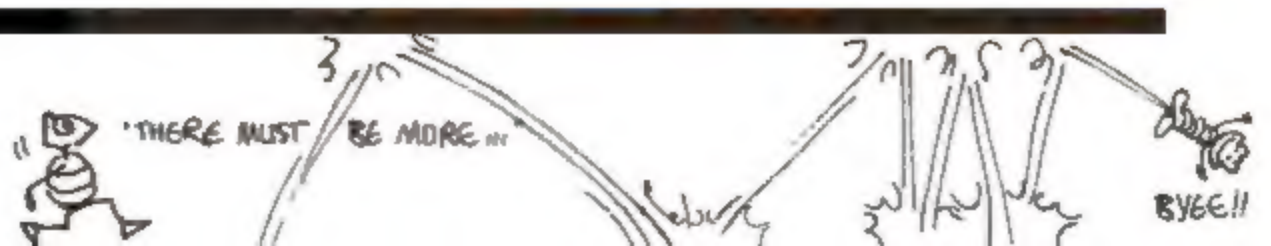
There were, of course, many behind-the-scenes people whose contribution to ZZAP!64 over the years was invaluable – too many to fit in here, sadly (Paul Rand gets a look-in on page 5). Two for special mention: **Mark Kendrick** (left), ZZAP!'s page designer and talented cartoonist 1985–94, moved with ease from paste-up to fully digital layout; **Glenys Powell** (later **Rignall**), ZZAP!'s editorial assistant for several years, became a firm favourite with any reader who wanted to moan about competition prizes, Lloyd Mangram or . . . well, anything really. And that, folks, is it for now. **Have a great 2019!**

AND LET'S NOT FORGET . . .

COMMODORE FORCE

These guys worked as hard as anyone, as 8-bit slowly sank . . .

Photo: Cameron Pound



In need of some further reading to bridge the gap to the Zzap! 64 Annual 2020? Look no further than...

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The Book of the Game of the Film (300 pages).
Hundreds of games were released in the '80s and early '90s as tie-ins with some of the world's most popular films, books, pop groups, television programmes, comics, tabletop RPGs and high-street brands. Author Jerry Ellis mounts a defiant, 150,000-word defence of one of the most unfairly frowned-upon trends of the electronic gaming industry's formative years. Paperback edition available now for £21.99 plus p&p.
"... so much content you'll be reading this for some time if you are to take in all of what's covered... the education you're being given by the author is simply brilliant..." – RVG

The 8-Bit Book – 1981 to 199x (230 pages).
A wistful look back at over two hundred of the most influential, inspiring and downright interesting games of the 8-bit era. Paperback edition available now for £17.99 plus p&p.
"... wonderfully presented... a varied and a highly informative read..." – Retro Gamer (Treasure of the Month, December 2009)
"... a truly varied read... effortlessly jumps from nostalgia to gaming history and even touches on design philosophy." – Obsolete Gamer
"... a real gem... depicts a whole epoch with dynamism and precision." – grospixels.com

Arcade Imperfect (300 pages).
The dream of being able to play accurate conversions of all the latest arcade games tantalised home computer gamers throughout the '80s, without ever quite coming true. Nevertheless, stripped-down versions of Space Invaders, Pac-Man, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Gauntlet, Bubble Bobble, Renegade, Galaxian, Yie Ar Kung-Fu, Dragon's Lair, Donkey Kong, Out Run, Dig Dug and hundreds of others still graced many a grateful gamer's library. Insert coin, press start and read the whole story here. Coming soon! Hardcover edition available early 2019 for £24.99 plus p&p.

To find out more about Jerry Ellis and his wonderful books, or to place an order, please visit the Golem Books website at bit.ly/golembooks

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